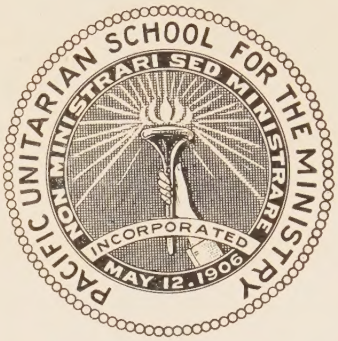

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DISCOURSE

ON THE

Evidences of Revealed Religion

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE UNIVERSITY IN CAMBRIDGE,

AT

THE DUDLEIAN LECTURE,

MARCH 14, 1821.

BY

WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING, D. D.

MINISTER OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH IN FEDERAL-STREET, BOSTON, NEW ENGLAND.

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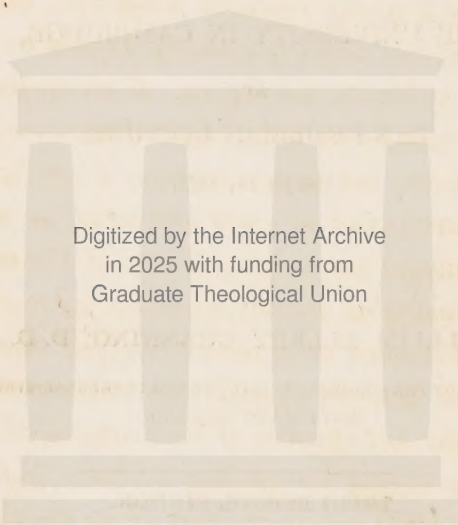

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The following Discourse is reprinted, under the conviction that it is eminently adapted to an age of intelligence and inquiry. It sets the leading evidences for the divine origin of Christianity, in a forcible, and in some measure, a new light. It is characterized by sound philosophy, as well as by enlarged and enlightened views of Christian faith; and by its accurate discriminating reasoning, its closeness of argument, energy of expression, and powerful appeals to the understanding, and to the best affections of the heart, it is calculated to impress the reflecting unbeliever, and to strengthen and animate the faith of the Christian.

To the intelligent and well-disposed young, who have made some progress in intellectual culture, it is peculiarly suited; and it cannot but leave impressions in their minds favourable to Christian obedience.

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In addition to the work which the author has mentioned in p. 39, may be strongly recommended a volume which is probably but little known, but which will be valued in proportion as it is known: Internal and Presumptive Evidences of Christianity, considered separately, and as uniting to form one argument: by JOHN SIMPSON. Sold by T. Egerton, London.

Bristol, 1822.

DISCOURSE.

JOHN iii. 2.

The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

THE evidences of revealed religion are the subject of this lecture; a subject of great extent, as well as of vast importance. In discussing it, an immense variety of learning has been employed, and all the powers of the intellect have been called forth. History, metaphysics, ethical science, and the science of human nature, have been summoned to the controversy, and have contributed to Christianity the aids of abstract reasoning, of criticism, of ancient learning, and of moral sentiment. To condense into one discourse what scholars and great men have written on this point, is impossible, even if it were desirable; and I have stated the extent of speculation into which our subject has led, not because I propose

to give an abstract of others' labours, but because I wish you to understand that the topic is one not easily despatched, and because I would invite you to follow me in a discussion, which will require concentrated and continued attention. A subject more worthy of attention, than the claims of that religion which was impressed on our childhood, and which is acknowledged to be the only firm foundation of the hope of immortality, cannot be presented; and our minds must want the ordinary seriousness of human nature, if it cannot arrest us.

That Christianity has been opposed, is a fact implied in the establishment of this lecture. That it has had adversaries of no mean intellect, you know. I propose in this discourse, to make some remarks on what seems to me the great objection to Christianity, on the general principle on which its evidences rest, and on some of its particular evidences.

The great objection to Christianity, the only one which has much influence at the present day, meets us at the very threshold. We cannot, if we would, evade it; for it is founded on a primary and essential attribute of the religion. The objection is oftener felt than expressed, and amounts to this—that miracles are incredible, and that the supernatural character of an alleged fact, is proof enough

of its falsehood. So strong is this propensity to doubt of departures from the order of nature, that there are sincere Christians who incline to rest their religion wholly on its internal evidence, and to overlook the outward extraordinary interposition of God, by which it was at first established. But the difficulty cannot in this way be evaded ; for Christianity is not only *confirmed* by miracles, but is *in itself,* in its very essence, a miraculous religion. It is not a system, which the human mind gathered, in the ordinary exercise of its powers, from the ordinary course of nature. It professes to be a supernatural communication from God. So that the objection which I have stated still presses upon us, and, if it be well grounded, it is fatal to Christianity.

It is proper then to begin the discussion with inquiring, whence the disposition to discredit miracles springs, and how far it is rational. A preliminary remark of some importance is, that this disposition is not a necessary part or principle of our mental constitution, like the disposition to trace effects to adequate causes. We are indeed so framed, as to expect a continuance of that order of nature which we have uniformly experienced; but not so framed as to revolt at alleged violations of that order, and to account them impossible or absurd. On the contrary, take men at large, and they

discover a strong and incurable propensity to believe in miracles. Almost all histories, until within the two last centuries, reported seriously supernatural facts. Scepticism, as to miracles, is comparatively a new thing, if we except the epicurean or atheistical sect among the ancients; and so far from being founded in human nature, it is resisted by an almost infinite preponderance of belief on the other side.

Whence then has this scepticism sprung? It may be explained by two principal causes: *First*, It is now an acknowledged fact, among enlightened men, that in past times and in our own, a strong disposition has existed and still exists to admit miracles without examination. Human credulity is found to have devoured nothing more eagerly than reports of prodigies. Now it is argued that we discover here a principle of human nature, namely, the love of the supernatural and marvellous, which accounts sufficiently for the belief of miracles, wherever we find it; and that it is consequently unnecessary and unphilosophical to seek for other causes, and especially to admit that most improbable one, the actual existence of miracles. This sweeping conclusion, is a specimen of that rash habit of generalizing, which rather distinguishes our times, and shews that philosophical reasoning has made fewer advances

than we are apt to boast. It is true, that there is a principle of credulity as to prodigies in a considerable part of society, a disposition to believe without due scrutiny. But this principle, like every other in our nature, has its limits; acts according to fixed laws; is not omnipotent; cannot make the eyes see, and the ears hear, and the understanding credit delusions, under all imaginable circumstances; but requires the concurrence of various circumstances and of other principles of our nature, in order to its operation. For example, the belief of spectral appearances has been very common; but under what circumstances and in what state of mind has it occurred? Do men see ghosts in broad day, and amidst cheerful society? Or in solitary places; in grave-yards; in twilights or mists, where outward objects are so undefined as easily to take a form from imagination; and in other circumstances favourable to terror, and associated with the delusion in question? The principle of credulity is as regular in its operation, as any other principle of the mind; and is so dependant on circumstances, and so restrained and checked by other parts of human nature, that sometimes the most obstinate incredulity is found in that very class of people, whose easy belief on other occasions moves our contempt. It is well known, for example, that

the efficacy of the vaccine inoculation has been encountered with much more unyielding scepticism among the vulgar, than among the improved; and in general it may be affirmed, that the credulity of the ignorant operates under the control of their strongest passions and impressions, and that no class of society yield a slower assent to positions, which manifestly subvert their old modes of thinking and most settled prejudices. It is then very unphilosophical to assume this principle as an explanation of all miracles whatever. I grant that the fact, that accounts of supernatural agency so generally prove false, is a reason for looking upon them with peculiar distrust. Miracles ought on this account to be sifted more than common facts. But if we find that a belief in a series of supernatural works has occurred under circumstances very different from those, under which false prodigies have been received, under circumstances most unfavourable to the operation of credulity; then this belief cannot be resolved into the common causes which have blinded men in regard to supernatural agency. We must look for other causes, and if none can be found but the actual existence of the miracles, then true philosophy binds us to believe them. I close this head with observing, that the propensity of men to believe in what is strange and miraculous, though a presump-

tion against particular miracles, is not a presumption against miracles universally, but rather the reverse; for great principles of human nature have generally a foundation in truth, and one explanation of this propensity so common to mankind is obviously this, that in the earlier ages of the human race, miraculous interpositions, suited to man's infant state, were not uncommon, and being the most striking facts of human history, they spread through all future times a belief and expectation of miracles.

I now proceed to the *second* cause of the scepticism in regard to supernatural agency, which has grown up, especially among the more improved, in later times. These later times are distinguished, as you well know, by successful researches into nature; and the discoveries of science have continually added strength to that great principle, that the phenomena of the universe are regulated by general and permanent laws, or that the Author of the universe exerts his power according to an established order. Nature, the more it is explored, is found to be uniform. We observe an unbroken succession of causes and effects. Many phenomena, once denominated irregular, and ascribed to supernatural agency, are found to be connected with preceding circumstances, as regularly as the most common events. The comet, we learn, observes the same attraction as the sun and planets. When

a new phenomenon now occurs, no one thinks it miraculous, but believes that, when better understood, it may be reduced to laws already known, or is an example of a law not yet investigated.

Now this increasing acquaintance with the uniformity of nature, begets a distrust of alleged violations of it, and a rational distrust too; for while many causes of mistake in regard to alleged miracles may be assigned, there is but one adequate cause of real miracles, that is, the power of God; and the regularity of nature forms a strong presumption against the miraculous exertion of this power, except in extraordinary circumstances, and for extraordinary purposes, to which the established laws of the creation are not competent. But the observation of the uniformity of nature not merely begets this rational distrust of alleged violations of it: it produces a secret feeling, as if such violations were impossible. That attention to the powers of nature, which is implied in scientific research, tends to weaken the practical conviction of a higher power; and the laws of the creation, instead of being regarded as the modes of divine operation, come insensibly to be considered as fetters on his agency, as too sacred to be suspended even by their Author. This secret feeling essentially atheistical, and at war with all sound philosophy, is the chief foundation of that scepticism which

prevails in regard to miraculous agency, and deserves our particular consideration.

To a man, whose belief in God is strong and practical, a miracle will appear as possible as any other effect, as the most common event in life; and the argument against miracles, drawn from the uniformity of nature, will weigh with him, only as far as this uniformity is a pledge and proof of the Creator's disposition to accomplish his purposes by a fixed order or mode of operation. Now it is freely granted that the Creator's regard or attachment to such an order may be inferred from the steadiness with which he observes it; and a strong presumption lies against any violation of it on slight occasions, or for purposes to which the established laws of nature are adequate. But this is the utmost which the order of nature authorizes us to infer respecting its Author. It forms no presumption against miracles universally, in all imaginable cases; but may even furnish a presumption in their favour.

We are never to forget that God's adherence to the order of the universe is not necessary and mechanical, but intelligent and voluntary. He adheres to it not for its own sake, or because it has a sacredness which compels him to respect it; but simply because it is most suited to accom-

plish purposes in which he is engaged. It is a means, and not an end; and, like all other means, must give way when the end can best be promoted without it. It is the mark of a weak mind to make an idol of order and method; to cling to established forms of business, when they clog instead of advancing it. If then the great purposes of the universe can best be accomplished by departing from its established laws, these laws will undoubtedly be suspended; and though broken in the letter, they will be observed in their spirit; for the ends, for which they were first instituted, will be advanced by their violation. Now the question arises, for what purposes were nature and its order appointed? and there is no presumption in saying, that the highest of these is the improvement of intelligent beings. Mind, (by which we mean both moral and intellectual powers,) is God's first end. The great purpose, for which an order of nature is fixed is plainly the formation of Mind. In a creation without order, where events would follow without any regular succession, it is obvious that Mind must be kept in perpetual infancy; for in such a universe, there could be no reasoning from effects to causes, no induction to establish general truths, no adaptation of means to ends; that is, no science relating to God, or matter, or mind; no action; no

virtue. The great purpose of God then, I repeat it, in establishing the order of nature, is to form and advance the mind; and if the case should occur in which the interests of the mind could best be advanced by departing from this order, or by miraculous agency, then the great purpose of the creation, the great end of its laws and regularity, would demand such departure; and miracles, instead of warring against, would concur with nature.

Now we Christians maintain, that such a case has existed. We affirm that, when Jesus Christ came into the world, nature had failed to communicate instructions to men, in which, as intelligent beings, they had the deepest concern, and on which the full development of their highest faculties essentially depended; and we affirm, that there was no prospect of relief from nature; so that an exigence had occurred, in which additional communications, supernatural lights, might rationally be expected from the Father of spirits. Let me state two particulars out of many, in which men needed intellectual aids, not given by nature: I refer to the doctrine of one God and Father, on which all piety rests; and to the doctrine of Immortality, which is the great spring of virtuous effort. Had I time to enlarge on the history of that period, I might shew you under what heaps of rubbish and

superstition these doctrines were buried. But I should repeat only what you know familiarly. The works of ancient genius, which form your studies, carry on their front the brand of polytheism, and of debasing error on subjects of the first and deepest concern. It is more important to observe, that the very uniformity of nature had some tendency to obscure the doctrines which I have named, or at least to impair their practical power, so that a departure from this uniformity was needed, to fasten them on men's minds.

That a fixed order of nature, though a proof of the One God to reflecting and enlarged understandings, has yet a tendency to hide him from men in general, will appear, if we consider first, that as the human mind is constituted, what is regular and of constant occurrence, excites it feebly; and benefits, flowing to it through fixed unchanging laws, seem to come by a kind of necessity, and are apt to be traced up to natural causes alone. Accordingly religious convictions and feelings, even in the present advanced condition of society, are excited not so much by the ordinary course of God's providence, as by sudden, unexpected events, which rouse and startle the mind, and speak *of* a power higher than nature.—There is another way, in which a fixed order of nature is unfavourable to just impressions respecting its Author. It discovers

to us in the Creator a regard to *general good*, rather than an affection to *individuals*. The laws of nature, operating, as they do, with an inflexible steadiness, never varying to meet the cases and wants of individuals, and inflicting much private suffering in their stern administration for general good, give the ideas of a distant, reserved sovereign, much more than of a tender parent; and yet this last view of God is the only effectual security from superstition and idolatry. Nature then would not have brought back the world to its Creator.—And as to the doctrine of Immortality, the order of the natural world had little tendency to teach this, at least with clearness and energy. The natural world contains no provisions or arrangements for reviving the dead. The sun and the rain, which cover the tomb with verdure, send no vital influences to the mouldering body. The researches of science detect no secret processes for restoring the lost powers of life. If man is to live again, he is not to live through any known laws of nature, but by a power higher than nature; and how then can we be *assured* of this truth, but by a manifestation of this power, that is, by miraculous agency confirming a future life?

I have laboured in these remarks to shew, that the uniformity of nature is no presumption against miraculous agency, when employed in confirmation

of such a religion as Christianity. Nature, on the contrary, furnishes a presumption in its favour. Nature clearly shews to us a power above itself, so that it proves miracles to be possible. Nature reveals purposes and attributes in its Author, with which Christianity remarkably agrees. Nature too has deficiencies, which shew that it was not intended by its Author to be his whole method of instructing mankind; and in this way it gives great confirmation to Christianity, which meets its wants, supplies its chasms, explains its mysteries, and lightens its heart-oppressing cares and sorrows.

Before quitting the general consideration of miracles, I ought to take some notice of Hume's celebrated argument on this subject; not that it merits the attention which it has received, for infidelity has seldom forged a weaker weapon; but because it is specious, and has derived weight from the name of its author. The argument is briefly this,—"That belief is founded upon and regulated "by experience. Now we often experience testi- "mony to be false, but never witness a departure "from the order of nature. That men may de- "ceive us when they testify to miracles, is therefore "more accordant with experience, than that nature "should be irregular; and hence there is a balance "of proof against miracles, a presumption so strong

" as to outweigh the strongest testimony."—The usual replies to this argument, I have not time to repeat. Dr. Campbell's work, which is accessible to all, will shew you that it rests on an equivocal use of terms; and will furnish you with many fine remarks on testimony, and on the condition or qualities which give it validity. I will only add a few remarks, which seem to me worthy of attention.

1. This argument affirms, that the credibility of facts or statements is to be decided by their accordance with the established order of nature, and by this standard only. Now if nature comprehended all existences and all powers, this position might be admitted. But if there is a Being higher than nature, the origin of all its powers and motions, and whose character falls under our notice and experience as truly as the creation, then there is an additional standard, to which facts and statements are to be referred; and works, which violate nature's order, will still be credible, if they agree with the known properties and attributes of its author; because for such works we can assign an adequate cause and sufficient reasons, and these are the qualities and conditions on which credibility depends.

2. This argument of Hume proves too much, and therefore proves nothing. It proves too much;

for I if am to reject the strongest testimony to miracles, because testimony has often deceived me, whilst nature's order has never been found to fail, then I ought to reject a miracle, even if I should see it with my own eyes, and if all my senses should attest it; for all my senses have sometimes given false reports, whilst nature has never gone astray; and therefore, be the circumstances ever so decisive or inconsistent with deception, still I must not believe what I see, and hear, and touch; what my senses, exercised according to the most deliberate judgment, declare to be true. All this the argument requires.—And it proves too much; for disbelief, in the case supposed, is out of our power, and is instinctively pronounced absurd; and what is more, it would subvert that very order of nature on which the argument rests; for this order of nature is learned only by the exercise of my senses and judgment, and if these fail me, in the most unexceptionable circumstances, then their testimony to nature is of little worth.

Once more; this argument is built on an ignorance of the nature of testimony, and it is surprising that this error has not been more strikingly exposed. Testimony, we are told, cannot prove a miracle. Now the truth is, that testimony, of itself and immediately, proves no fact whatever, not even the most common. Testimony can do nothing more

than shew us the state of another's mind in regard to a given fact. It can only shew us that the testifier has a belief, a conviction, that a certain phenomenon or event has occurred. Here testimony stops; and the reality of the event is to be judged altogether from the nature and degree of this conviction, and from the circumstances under which it exists. This conviction is an effect, which must have a cause, and needs to be explained; and if no cause can be found but the real occurrence of the event, then this occurrence is admitted as true. Such is the extent of testimony. Now a man, who affirms a miraculous phenomenon or event, may give us just as decisive proofs, by his character and conduct, of the strength and depth of his conviction, as if he were affirming a common occurrence. Testimony then does just as much in the case of miracles as of common events; that is, it discloses to us the conviction of another's mind. Now this conviction in the case of miracles, requires a cause, an explanation, as much as in every other; and if the circumstances be such, that it could not have sprung up and been established but by the reality of the alleged miracle, then that great and fundamental principle of human belief, namely, that every effect must have a cause, compels us to admit the miracle.

It may be observed of Hume and of other philo-

sophical opposers of our religion, that they are much more inclined to argue against miracles *in general*, than against the particular miracles on which Christianity rests. And the reason is obvious. Miracles, when considered in a general, abstract manner, that is, when divested of all circumstances, and supposed to occur as disconnected facts, to stand alone in history, to have no explanations or reasons in preceding events, and no influence on those which follow, are indeed open to great objection, as wanton and useless violations of nature's order; and it is accordingly against miracles, considered in this naked, general form, that the arguments of infidelity are chiefly urged. But it is great disingenuity to class under this head the miracles of Christianity. They are palpably different. They do not stand alone in history; but are most intimately incorporated with it. They were demanded by the state of the world which preceded them, and they have left deep traces on all subsequent ages. In fact, the history of the whole civilized world, since their alleged occurrence, has been swayed and coloured by them, and is wholly inexplicable without them. Now such miracles are not to be met and disposed of by general reasonings, which apply only to insulated, unimportant, uninfluential prodigies.

I have thus considered the objections to miracles

in general; and I would close this head with observing, that these objections will lose their weight, just in proportion as we strengthen our conviction of God's power over nature and of his paternal interest in his creatures. The great repugnance to the belief of miraculous agency is founded in a lurking atheism, which ascribes supremacy to nature, and which, whilst it professes to believe in God, questions his tender concern for the improvement of men. To a man who cherishes a sense of God, the great difficulty is, not to account for miracles, but to account for their rare occurrence. One of the mysteries of the universe is this, that its Author retires so continually behind the veil of his works, that the great and good Father does not manifest himself more distinctly to his creatures. There is something like coldness and repulsiveness, in instructing us only by fixed, inflexible laws of nature. The intercourse of God with Adam and the Patriarchs, suits our best conceptions of the relation which he bears to the human race, and ought not to surprise us more than the expression of a human parent's tenderness and concern towards his offspring.

After the remarks now made to remove the objection to revelation in general, I proceed to consider the evidences of the Christian religion in

particular ; and these are so numerous, that should I attempt to compress them into the short space which now remains, I could give but a syllabus, a dry and uninteresting index. It will be more useful to state to you, with some distinctness, the *general principle* into which all Christian evidences may be resolved, and on which the whole religion rests, and then to illustrate it in a few striking particulars.

All the evidences of Christianity may be traced to this great principle,—that every effect must have an adequate cause. We claim for our religion a divine original, because no adequate cause for it can be found in the powers or passions of human nature, or in the circumstances under which it appeared ; because it can only be accounted for by the interposition of that Being, to whom its first preachers universally ascribed it, and with whose nature it perfectly agrees.

Christianity, by which we mean not merely the doctrines of the religion, but every thing relating to it, its rise, its progress, the character of its Author, the conduct of its propagators ; Christianity, in this broad sense, can only be accounted for in two ways. It either sprung from the principles of human nature, under the excitements, motives, impulses of the age in which it was first preached ; or it had its origin in higher and supernatural agency. To

which of these causes the religion should be referred, is not a question beyond our reach; for being partakers of human nature, and knowing more of it than any other part of the creation, we can judge with sufficient accuracy of the operation of its principles, and of the effects to which they are competent. It is indeed true, that human powers are not exactly defined, nor can we state precisely the bounds beyond which they cannot pass; but still the disproportion between human nature and an effect ascribed to it, may be so vast and palpable as to satisfy us at once that the effect is inexplicable by human power. I know not precisely what advances may be made by the intellect of an unassisted savage; but that a savage in the woods could not compose the Principia of Newton, is about as plain as that he could not create the world. I know not the point at which bodily strength must stop; but that a man cannot carry Atlas or Andes, on his shoulders, is a safe position. The question, therefore, whether the principles of human nature, under the circumstances in which it was placed at Christ's birth, will explain his religion, is one to which we are competent, and is the great question on which the whole controversy turns.

Now we maintain that a great variety of facts belonging to this religion,—such as the character of its Founder; its peculiar principles; the style

and character of its records; its progress; the conduct, circumstances, and sufferings of its first propagators; the reception of it from the first on the ground of miraculous attestations; the prophecies which it fulfilled and which it contains; its influence on society, and other circumstances connected with it; are utterly inexplicable by human powers and principles, but accord with, and are fully explained by, the power and perfection of God.

These various particulars I cannot attempt to unfold. One or two may be illustrated, to shew you the mode of applying the principles which I have laid down. I will take first the *character of Jesus Christ.* How is this to be explained by the principles of human nature?—We are immediately struck with this peculiarity in the Author of Christianity, that whilst all other men are formed in a measure by the spirit of the age, we can discover in Jesus no impression of the period in which he lived. We know with considerable accuracy the state of society, the modes of thinking, the hopes and expectations of the country in which Jesus was born and grew up; and he is as free from them, and as exalted above them, as if he had lived in another world, or, with every sense shut on the objects around him. His character has in it nothing local or temporary. It can be explained by nothing

around him. His history shews him to us a solitary being, living for purposes which none but himself comprehended, and enjoying not so much as the sympathy of a single mind. His apostles, his chosen companions, brought to him the spirit of the age; and nothing shews its strength more strikingly, than the slowness with which it yielded in these honest men to the instructions of Jesus.

Jesus came to a nation expecting a Messiah; and he claimed this character. But instead of conforming to the opinions which prevailed in regard to the Messiah, he resisted them wholly and without reserve. To a people anticipating a triumphant leader, under whom vengeance as well as ambition was to be glutted by the prostration of their oppressors, he came as a spiritual leader teaching humility and peace. This undisguised hostility to the dearest hopes and prejudices of his nation; this disdain of the usual compliances, by which ambition and imposture conciliate adherents; this deliberate exposure of himself to rejection and hatred cannot easily be explained by the common principles of human nature, and excludes the possibility of selfish aims in the Author of Christianity.

One striking peculiarity in Jesus is the *extent*, the vastness of his views. Whilst all around him

looked for a Messiah to liberate God's ancient people; whilst to every other Jew, Judea was the exclusive object of pride and hope; Jesus came, declaring himself to be the deliverer and light of *the world;* and in his whole teaching and life, you see a consciousness, which never forsakes him, of a relation to the whole human race. This idea of blessing mankind, of spreading a universal religion, was the most magnificent which had ever entered man's mind, All previous religions had been given to particular nations. No conqueror, legislator, philosopher, in the extravagance of ambition, had ever dreamed of subjecting all nations to a common faith.

This conception of a universal religion, intended alike for Jew and Gentile, for all nations and climes, is wholly inexplicable by the circumstances of Jesus. He was a Jew; and the first and deepest and most constant impression on a Jew's mind, was that of the superiority conferred on his people and himself by the national religion introduced by Moses. The wall between the Jew and the Gentile seemed to reach to heaven. The abolition of the peculiarity of Moses, the overthrow of the temple on Mount Sinai, the erection of a new religion, in which all men would meet as brethren, and which would be the common and equal property of Jew and Gentile, these were of all ideas the last to spring

up in Judea, the last for enthusiasm or imposture to originate.

Compare next these views of Christ with his station in life. He was of humble birth and education, with nothing in his lot, with no extensive means, no rank, or wealth, or patronage, to infuse vast thoughts and extravagant plans. The shop of a carpenter, the village of Nazareth, were not spots for ripening a scheme, more aspiring and extensive than had ever been formed. It is a principle of human nature, that except in case of insanity, *some* proportion is observed between the power of an individual and his plans and hopes. The purpose to which Jesus devoted himself was as ill suited to his condition as an attempt to change the seasons, or to make the sun rise in the west. That a young man, in obscure life, belonging to an oppressed nation, should seriously think of subverting the time-hallowed and deep-rooted religions of the world, is a strange fact; but with this purpose we see the mind of Jesus thoroughly imbued; and, sublime as it is, he never falls below it in his language or conduct; but speaks and acts with a consciousness of superiority, with a dignity and authority, becoming this unparalleled destination.

In this connexion I cannot but add another striking circumstance in Jesus, and that is, the calm confidence with which he always looked for-

ward to the accomplishment of his design. He fully knew the strength of the passions and powers which were arrayed against him, and was perfectly aware that his life was to be shortened by violence; yet not a word escapes him, implying a doubt of the ultimate triumphs of his religion. One of the beauties of the Gospels, and one of the proofs of their genuineness, is found in our Saviour's indirect and obscure allusions to his approaching sufferings, and to the glory which was to follow; allusions shewing us the workings of a mind thoroughly conscious of being appointed to accomplish infinite good through great calamity. This entire and patient relinquishment of immediate success, this ever-present persuasion that he was to perish before his religion would advance, and this calm, unshaken anticipation of distant and unbounded triumphs, are remarkable traits, throwing a tender and solemn grandeur over our Lord, and wholly inexplicable by human principles, or by the circumstances in which he was placed.

The views hitherto taken of Christ, relate to his public character and office. If we pass to what may be called his private character, we shall receive the same impression of inexplicable excellence. The most striking trait in Jesus was, undoubtedly, benevolence; and although this virtue had existed before, yet it had not been manifested in the same

form and extent. Christ's benevolence was distinguished first by its expansiveness. At that age, an unconfined philanthrophy, proposing and toiling to do good, without distinction of country or rank, was unknown. Love to man as man, love, comprehending the hated Samaritan and the despised publican, was a feature which separated Jesus from the best men of his nation and of the world. Another characteristic of the benevolence of Jesus was its gentleness and tenderness, forming a strong contrast with the hardness and ferocity of the spirit and manners which then prevailed, and with that sternness and inflexibility which the purest philosophy of Greece and Rome inculcated as the perfection of virtue. But its most distinguishing trait was its superiority to injury. Revenge was one of the recognized rights of the age in which he lived; and though a few sages, who had seen its inconsistency with man's dignity, had condemned it, yet none had inculcated the duty of regarding one's worst enemies with that kindness which God manifests to sinful men, and of returning curses with blessings and prayers. This form of benevolence, the most disinterested and divine form, was, as you well know, manifested by Jesus Christ in infinite strength, amidst injuries and indignities which cannot be surpassed. Now this singular eminence of goodness, this superiority to the degrading influen-

ces of the age, under which all other men suffered, needs to be explained; and one thing it demonstrates, that Jesus Christ was not an unprincipled deceiver, exposing not only his own life, but the lives of confiding friends, in an enterprize next to desperate.

I cannot enlarge on other traits of the character of Christ. I will only observe, that it had one distinction, which, more than any thing, forms a perfect character. It was made up of contrasts; in other words, it was a union of excellencies which are not easily reconciled, which seem at first sight incongruous, but which, when blended and duly proportioned, constitute moral harmony, and attract, with equal power, love and veneration. For example, we discover in Jesus Christ an unparalleled dignity of character, a consciousness of greatness, never discovered or approached by any other individual in history; and yet this was blended with a condescension, lowliness, and unostentatious simplicity, which had never before been thought consistent with greatness. In like manner he united an utter superiority to the world, to its pleasures and ordinary interests, with suavity of manners and freedom of austerity. He joined strong feeling and self-possession; an indignant sensibility to sin, and compassion to the sinner; an intense devotion to his work, and calmness

under opposition and ill success ; a universal philanthropy, and a susceptibility of private attachments ; the authority which became the Saviour of the world, and the tenderness and gratitude of a son. Such was the Author of our religion. And is his character to be explained by imposture or insane enthusiasm ? Does it not bear the unambiguous marks of a heavenly origin ?

Perhaps it may be said, this character never existed. Then the invention of it is to be explained, and the reception which this fiction met with ; and these perhaps are as difficult of explanation on natural principles, as its real existence. Christ's history bears all the marks of reality : a more frank, simple, unlaboured, unostentatious narrative was never penned. Besides, his character, if invented, must have been an invention of singular difficulty, because no models existed on which to frame it. He stands alone in the records of time. The conception of a being, proposing such new and exalted ends, and governed by higher principles than the progress of society had devoloped, implies singular intellectual power. That several individuals should join in equal vivid conceptions of this character ; and should not merely describe in general terms the fictitious being to whom it was attributed, but should introduce him into real life, should place him in a great variety of circumstances, in con-

nexion with various ranks of men, with friends and foes, and should in all preserve his identity, shew the same great and singular mind always acting in harmony with itself; this is a supposition hardly credible, and, when the circumstances of the writers of the New Testament are considered, seems to be as inexplicable on human principles, as what I before suggested, the composition of Newton's Principia by a savage. The character of Christ, though delineated in an age of great moral darkness, has stood the scrutiny of ages; and in proportion as men's moral sentiments have been refined, its beauty has been more seen and felt. To suppose it invented, is to suppose that its authors, outstripping their age, had attained to a singular delicacy and elevation of moral perception and feeling. But these attainments are not very reconcileable with the character of its authors, supposing it to be a fiction; that is, with the character of habitual liars and impious deceivers.

But we are not only unable to discover power adequate to this invention. There must have been *motives* for it; for men do not make great efforts, without strong motives; and in the whole compass of human incitements, we challenge the infidel to suggest any, which could have prompted to the work, now to be explained.

Once more, it must be recollected, that this

invention, if it were one, was received as real, at a period so near to the time ascribed to Christ's appearance, that the means of detecting it were infinite. That men should send out such a forgery, and that it should prevail and triumph, are circumstances not easily reconcileable with the principles of our nature.

The character of Christ, then, was real. Its reality is the only explanation of the mighty revolution produced by his religion. And how can you account for it, but by that cause to which he always referred it, a mission from the Father?

Next to the character of Christ, *his Religion* might be shewn to abound in circumstances which contradict and repel the idea of a human origin. For example, its representations of the paternal character of God; its inculcation of a universal charity; the stress which it lays on inward purity; its substitution of a spiritual worship for the forms and ceremonies, which every where had usurped the name and extinguished the life of religion; its preference of humility, and of the mild, unostentatious passive virtues, to the dazzling qualities which had monopolized men's admiration; its consistent and bright discoveries of immortality; its adaptation to the wants of man as a sinnner; its adaptation to all the conditions, capacities, and sufferings of

human nature; its pure, sublime, yet practicable morality; its high and generous motives; and its fitness to form a character, which plainly prepares for a higher life than the present; these are peculiarities of Christianity; which will strike us more and more, in proportion as we understand distinctly the circumstances of the age and country in which this religion appeared, and for which no adequate human cause has been or can be assigned.

Passing over these topics, each of which might be enlarged into a discourse, I will make but one remark on this religion, which strikes my own mind very forcibly. Since its introduction, human nature has made great progress, and society experienced great changes; and in this advanced condition of the world, Christianity, instead of losing its application and importance is found to be more and more congenial and adapted to man's nature and wants. Men have outgrown the other institutions of that period when Christianity appeared, its philosophy, its modes of warfare, its policy, its public and private economy; but Christianity has never shrunk as intellect has opened, but has always kept in advance of men's faculties, and unfolded nobler views in proportion as they have ascended. The highest powers and affections, which our nature has developed, find more than adequate objects in this

religion. Christianity is indeed peculiarly fitted to the more improved stages of society, to the more delicate sensibilities of refined minds, and especially to that dissatisfaction with the present state, which always grows with the growth of our moral powers and affections. As men advance in civilization, they become susceptible of mental sufferings, to which ruder ages are strangers; and these Christianity is fitted to assuage. Imagination and intellect become more restless; and Christianity brings them tranquillity by the eternal and magnificent truths, the solemn and unbounded prospects which it unfolds. This fitness of our religion to more advanced stages of society than that in which it was introduced, to wants of human nature not then developed, seems to me very striking. The religion bears the marks of having come from a being who perfectly understood the human mind, and had power to provide for its progress. This feature of Christianity is of the nature of prophecy. It was an anticipation of future and distant ages; and when we consider among whom our religion sprung, where, but in God, can we find an explanation of this peculiarity?

I have now offered a few hints on the character of Christ, and on the character of his religion; and before quitting these topics, I would observe, that they form a strong presumption in favour of the

miraculous facts of the Christian history. These miracles were not wrought by a man, whose character in other respects was ordinary. They were acts of a being, whose mind was as singular as his works, who spoke and acted with more than human authority, whose moral qualities and sublime purposes were in accordance with superhuman powers. Christ's miracles are in unison with his whole character, and bear a proportion to it, like that which we observe in the most harmonious productions of nature ; and in this way they receive from it great confirmation. And the same presumption in their favour arises from his religion. That a religion, carrying in itself such marks of divinity, and so inexplicable on human principles, should receive outward confirmations from omnipotence, is not surprising. The extraordinary character of the religion accords with, and seems to demand, extraordinary interpositions in its behalf. Its miracles are not solitary, naked, unexplored, disconnected events ; but are bound up with a system, which is worthy of God, and impressed with God ; which occupies a large space, and is operating with great and increasing energy in human affairs.

As yet I have not touched on what seem to many writers the strongest proofs of Christianity, I mean the *direct evidences of its miracles*, by which we

mean the testimony borne to them, including the character, conduct, and condition of the witnesses. These I have not time to unfold; nor is this labour needed; for Paley's inestimable work, which is one of your classical books, has stated these proofs with great clearness and power. I would only observe, that they may all be resolved into this single principle, namely, that the Christian miracles were originally believed under such circumstances, that this belief can only be explained by their actual occurrence. That Christianity was received at first on the ground of miracles, and that its first preachers and converts proved the depth and strength of their conviction of these facts, by attesting them in sufferings and in death, we know from the most ancient records, which relate to this religion, both Christian and heathen; and, in fact, this conviction can alone explain their adherence to Christianity. Now that this conviction could only have sprung from the reality of the miracles, we infer from the known circumstances of these witnesses, whose passions, interests, and strongest prejudices were originally hostile to the new religion; whose motives for examining with care the facts on which it rested were as urgent and solemn, and whose means and opportunities of ascertaining their truth were as ample and unfailing, as can be conceived to conspire; so that the supposition of their false-

hood cannot be admitted, without subverting our trust in human judgment and human testimony under the most favourable circumstances for discovering truth; that is, without introducing universal scepticism.

There is one class of Christian evidences to which I have but slightly referred, but which has struck with peculiar force men of reflecting minds. I refer to the marks of truth and reality which are found in the *Christian records;* to the internal proofs which the books of the New Testament carry with them, of having been written by men, who lived in the first age of Christianity, who believed and felt its truth, who bore a part in the labours and conflicts which attended its establishment, and who wrote from personal knowledge and deep conviction. A few remarks to illustrate the nature and power of these internal proofs, which are furnished by the books of the New Testament, I will now subjoin.

The New Testament consists of histories and epistles. The historical books, namely, the Gospels and the Acts, are a continued narrative, embracing many years, and professing to give the history of the rise and progress of the religion. Now it is worthy of observation, that these writings completely answer their end; that they completely solve the

problem, how this peculiar religion grew up and established itself in the world; that they furnish precise and adequate causes for this stupendous revolution in human affairs. It is also worthy of remark, that they relate a series of facts, which are not only connected with one another, but are intimately linked with the long series which has followed them, and agree accurately with subsequent history, so as to account for and sustain it. Now that a collection of *fictitious* narratives, coming from different hands, comprehending many years, and spreading over many countries, should not only form a consistent whole, when taken by themselves; but should also connect and interweave themselves with real history so naturally and intimately as to furnish no clue for detection, as to exclude the appearance of incongruity and discordance, and as to give an adequate explanation, and the only explanation of acknowledged events, of the most important revolution in society; this is a supposition, from which an intelligent man at once revolts, and which, if admitted, would shake a principal foundation of history.

I have before spoken of the unity and consistency of Christ's character, as developed in the Gospels, and of the agreement of the different writers in giving us the singular features of his mind. Now there are the same marks of truth

running through the whole of these narratives. For example, the effects produced by Jesus on the various classes of society; the different feelings of admiration, attachment, and envy, which he called forth; the various expressions of these feelings; the prejudices, mistakes, and gradual illumination of his disciples; these are all given to us with such marks of truth and reality as could not easily be counterfeited. The whole history is precisely such as might be expected from the actual appearance of such a person as Jesus Christ, in such a state of society as then existed.

The Epistles, if possible, abound in marks of truth and reality even more than the Gospels. They are imbued thoroughly with the spirit of the first age of Christianity. They bear all the marks of having come from men, plunged in the conflicts which the new religion excited, alive to its interests, identified with its fortunes. They betray the very state of mind, which must have been generated by the peculiar condition of the first propagators of the religion. They are letters written on real business, intended for immediate effects, designed to meet prejudices and passions, which such a religion must at first have awakened. They contain not a trace of the circumstances of a later age, or of the feelings, impressions, and modes of thinking by which later times were characterized, and

from which later writers could not easily have escaped. The letters of Paul have a remarkable agreement with his history. They are precisely such as might be expected from a man of a vehement mind, who had been brought up in the schools of Jewish literature, who had been converted by a sudden overwhelming miracle, who had been entrusted with the preaching of the new religion to the Gentiles, who had been every where met by the prejudices and persecuting spirit of his own nation. They are full of obscurities growing out of these points of Paul's history and character, and out of the circumstances of the infant church, and which nothing but an intimate acquaintance with that early period can illustrate. This remarkable infusion of the spirit of the first age into the Christian records, cannot easily be explained but by the fact, that they were written in that age by the real and zealous propagators of Christianity, and that they are records of real convictions and of actual events.

There is another evidence of Christianity, still more internal than any on which I have yet dwelt, an evidence to be *felt* rather than described, but not less real because founded on feeling. I refer to that conviction of the divine original of our religion, which springs up and continually gains

strength in those who apply it habitually in their tempers and lives, and who imbibe its spirit and hopes. In such men, there is a consciousness of the adaptation of Christianity to their noblest faculties; a consciousness of its exalting and consoling influences, of its power to confer the true happiness of human nature, to give that peace which the world cannot give; which assures them that it is not of earthly origin, but a ray from the Everlasting Light, a stream from the Fountain of Heavenly Wisdom and Love. This is the evidence which sustains the faith of thousands, who never read and cannot understand the learned books of Christian apologists; who want, perhaps, words to explain the ground of their belief, but whose faith is of adamantine firmness; who hold the Gospel with a conviction more intimate and unwavering than *mere* argument ever produced.

But I must tear myself from a subject which opens upon me continually as I proceed. Imperfect as this discussion is, the conclusion, I trust, is placed beyond doubt, that Christianity is true. And, my hearers, if true, it is the greatest of all truths, deserving and demanding our reverent attention and fervent gratitude. This religion must never be confounded with our common blessings. It is a revelation of pardon, which, as sinners, we all need. Still more, it is a revelation of human Immortality;

a doctrine, which, however undervalued amidst the bright anticipations of inexperienced youth, is found to be our strength and consolation, and the only effectual spring of persevering and victorious virtue, when the realities of life have scattered our visionary hopes; when pain, disappointment, and temptation press upon us; when this world's enjoyments are found unable to quench that deep thirst of happiness which burns in every breast; when friends, whom we love as our own souls, die, and our own graves open before us.—To all who hear me, and especially to my young hearers, I would say, let the truth of this religion be the strongest conviction of your understandings; let its motives and precepts sway with an absolute power your character and lives.

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DR. CHANNING,

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SERMONS,

BY

RICHARD PRICE, D.D. F.R.S.

AND

JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL.D. F.R.S.

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SERMON I.

OF THE SECURITY OF A VIRTUOUS COURSE.

PROVERBS x. 9.

He that walketh uprightly walketh surely.

THESE words express one of the most important of all maxims. They tell us, that in the practice of virtue there is SAFETY. Much higher praise may be bestowed upon it. We may say that with it are connected peace, honour, dignity, the favour of God, happiness *now*, and ETERNAL happiness *hereafter:* and we have reason enough to think this true. But whether true or not, it is at least true, that there is safety in it.

Christianity informs us, that good men will be raised from death, to enjoy a glorious immortality, through that Saviour of the world who tasted death for every man. But let the evidence for this be supposed precarious and unsatisfactory. Let it be reckoned uncertain, whether a virtuous course will terminate in such infinite blessings under the divine government as Christians are taught to expect: still there will remain sufficient evidence to prove,

that in all events it must be the *safest*, and therefore our *wisest* course.

I cannot better employ the present time, than in endeavouring to explain and illustrate this truth. But previously to this, it will not be amiss to make a few observations on the character of the man who walks uprightly.

Uprightness signifies the same with integrity or sincerity. It implies a freedom from guile and the faithful discharge of every known duty. An upright man allows himself in nothing that is inconsistent with truth and right. He complies with all the obligations he is under, and avoids every kind of prevarication and falsehood. He maintains an equal and uniform regard to the whole of righteousness. He hates alike all sin, and practises every part of virtue, from an unfeigned attachment to it established in his soul. This is what is most essential to the character of an upright man. He is governed by no sinister ends, or indirect views, in the discharge of his duty. It is not the love of fame, or the desire of private advantages, or mere natural temper, that produces his virtuous conduct; but an affection to virtue *as* virtue; a sense of the weight and excellence of the obligations of righteousness; and a zeal for the honour of God and the happiness of mankind. But to be a little more particular:—

Uprightness of character comprehends in it right

conduct with respect to God, and man, and ourselves. The person I am describing, is, first of all, upright in all his transactions with GOD. His religion is not a hypocritical show and ostentation. He *is* that which he *appears* to be to his fellow-creatures. His religious acts are emanations from a heart full of piety. He makes conscience of *private* as well as *public* devotion, and endeavours to walk blameless in all God's ordinances. He attends on religious services, not to be seen of men, but from a sense of duty and gratitude to his Maker; and, instead of making them a cover for bad designs, or compensations for immorality, he makes them incentives to the discharge of all moral duties, and the means of rendering him more benevolent, amiable and worthy.

Again. Uprightness implies faithfulness in all our transactions with *ourselves*. It is very common for men to impose upon themselves; to wink at offensive truths; and to practise unfair arts with their own minds. This is entirely inconsistent with the character of an upright man. He endeavours to be faithful to himself in all that he thinks and does, and to divest his mind of all unreasonable biasses. He is fair and honest in all his inquiries and deliberations, ready to own his mistakes, and thankful for every help to discover them. He wishes to know nothing but what is true, and to *practise* nothing but what is right. He is open to convic-

tion, indifferent where he finds truth, and prepared to follow it wherever it can lead him. He is often disciplining his heart, searching into the principles of conduct within him, and labouring to detect his faults in order to rectify them.

Further. Uprightness includes in it candour, fairness, and honesty in all our transactions with our *fellow-creatures*. An upright man may be depended upon in all his professions and engagements. He never, in any affair, goes beyond the limits of justice and equity. He never deceives or overreaches. He is true to his promises, and faithful to every trust reposed in him. All his gains are the gains of virtuous industry. All falsehood and lies, all low cunning and fraudulent practices are his abhorrence. In short; he maintains a strict regard to veracity in his words, and to honour in his dealings. He adheres stedfastly in all circumstances to what he judges to be rightest and best; and were it possible for you to look through his soul, you would see the love of goodness predominant within him. You would see benevolence and piety governing his thoughts. You would see him within the inclosure of his own breast, as honest and worthy as he is on the open stage of the world.

Such is the character of the man who walks uprightly. I am next to show you how *surely* he walks.

In order to acquire a just notion of this, it is proper we should take into consideration, first,

the safety which such a person enjoys with respect to the happiness of the present life. Nothing is plainer than that, if we regard only our temporal interest, an upright course is the safest course. In order to be sensible of this, you should think of the troubles which men very often bring upon themselves by deviating from integrity. It is very difficult to go on for any time in dishonesty and falsehood, without falling into perplexity and distress. A man in such a course suspects every body, and is suspected by every body. He wants the love and esteem of his fellow-creatures. He is obliged to be continually on his guard, and to use arts to evade law and justice. He walks in the dark along a crooked path full of snares and pits. On the contrary, the path of uprightness is straight and broad. It is smooth, open, and easy. He that walks in it walks in the light, and may go on with resolution and confidence, inviting rather than avoiding the inspection of his fellow-creatures. He is apprehensive of no dangers. He is afraid of no detection. He is liable to none of the causes of shame and disgrace. It is an advantage to him to be observed and watched. The more narrowly his conduct is examined, the more he will be loved and respected.

A person, for instance, who, in the affairs of trade, deviates from truth and honour, is likely to sink into great calamities. Want, and trouble,

and infamy often prove his lot. Most of us have been witnesses of this. How many instances are there of persons who, forsaking the plain path of uprightness, have entangled themselves beyond the possibility of being extricated, and involved their families in the deepest misery; but who probably, had they been honest, would have escaped every difficulty, and passed through life easily and happily? We know not, indeed, what we do, when we turn aside from virtue and righteousness. Such a train of consequences may follow, as will issue in the loss of all that is valuable. It is past doubt, that, in every profession and calling, the way of uprightness is the most free from perplexity. It is the way of peace and satisfaction. He that keeps in it will at least avoid the pain of a reproaching conscience. He is sure of enjoying his own approbation; and it may be expected, that his worldly affairs will go on smoothly, quietly, and comfortably.

This puts me in mind of desiring you to consider particularly, that an upright conduct is commonly the most sure way to obtain success in our worldly concerns. You will observe, that I say it is the most *sure* way; not that it is the *shortest*. There are many more *expeditious* ways of getting money and acquiring fortunes. He that will violate the rules of justice, or break the laws of his country, or not scruple to take false oaths, may easily get

the start of an upright man, and rise in a little time to wealth and preferment. It is often in a man's power, by a base action, to introduce himself at once into ease and plenty. But wretched are those men who secure any worldly advantages by such methods. There is a canker at the root of their successes and riches. What they gain is unspeakably less than what they lose. It is attended with inward anguish, with the curse of heaven, and inconceivable future danger. But though it must be thus acknowledged, that there are *shorter* ways to profit and success than by walking uprightly, there are certainly none so *sure*. Universal experience has proved that (agreeably to a common and excellent maxim) "honesty is the best policy." It may be slow in its operation; and, for this reason, many persons have not patience enough for it. But it is in the end generally certain. An upright man must recommend himself by degrees to all that know him. He has always the greatest credit, and the most unembarrassed affairs. There are none who are not disposed to place a confidence in him, and who do not choose to deal with him. The disadvantages, therefore, already mentioned, under which he labours, are counterbalanced by many great advantages. He may not be able to thrive so fast, nor perhaps so *much* as others. He is obliged to deny himself the gains which others make by the wrong practices common in their trade; and, on

this account, he may be under a necessity of contenting himself with small gains. But it must be considered, that he can seldom fail of a tolerable subsistence, attended with comfort and the truest enjoyment of himself. Though his gains may be small, they are always sweet. He has with them an easy conscience, the blessing of God, and security against numberless grievous evils. And the smallest gains of this sort are infinitely preferable to the greatest gains that can be obtained by wrong methods.

Thus you see that, with respect to our interest in *this* world, he that walketh uprightly walketh surely.—Let us next consider the security which an upright conduct gives with respect to *another* world.

After this life is over, we are to enter on another world. The most sceptical principles give us no sufficient reason for denying this. Whatever may be true of the order and administration of nature, it must be *possible* that there should be a future state. And, if there is, it is highly probable, that it will be a state of much greater extent and longer duration than the present. Nothing, therefore, can be of more consequence to us than to know by what means we may secure the best condition and the greatest safety in it: and it is not possible to doubt, but the practice of religious goodness is the proper means to be used for this purpose. If any thing is

clear, it is so, that the upright and the worthy, in all events, through every period of duration, must stand the best chance for escaping misery and obtaining happiness. That our happiness hereafter may depend on our conduct here is certain, because we find, in the present state, that the happiness of every successive period of human life is made to depend, in a great measure, on our conduct in the preceding periods. The happiness of mature life depends on the habits acquired and the pains taken in early life; and mature life spent in folly and vice generally makes a miserable old age. It is, therefore, very credible that a virtuous conduct may have an effect on our condition hereafter. No one, indeed, can well carry infidelity so far as to deny, that, if there is a future state, it is likely that the righteous will fare better in it than the wicked. All we observe of the government of the Deity, and all that we can learn with respect to his character, leads us to believe that he must approve righteousness and hate wickedness: and, in the same proportion that he does this, he must favour the one and discountenance the other. We see, in what lies before us of the constitution of the world, many great evils annexed to wickedness, and many great blessings annexed to righteousness; and we see, likewise, in the one an essential tendency to produce universal evil, and in the other an essential tendency to produce universal good.

This demonstrates to us the holy disposition of the Author of nature; and what we ought to reckon upon, is, that he will manifest this disposition more and more; and that the scheme of moral government now begun will be hereafter completed. To act righteously is to act like God. It is to promote the order of his creation. It is to go into his constitution of nature. It is to follow that conscience which he has given us to be the guide of our conduct. It must, therefore, be the likeliest way to arrive at happiness, and to guard against misery under his government. The accountableness of our natures, and our necessary perceptions of excellence and good desert in virtue, demonstrate this; nor is it at all conceivable, that we do not go upon sure grounds, when we draw this conclusion. But there is much more to be here said. There are many reasons which prove, that the neglect of virtue may be followed by a dreadful punishment hereafter. The presages of concience; the concurring voice of mankind in all ages; our unavoidable apprehensions of ill-desert in vice; and the distresses now produced by it, are enough to lead us to expect this. The christian religion confirms this expectation in a manner the most awful, by teaching us that the *wicked shall be turned into hell with all that forget God;* that they shall be excluded from the society of wise and good beings; and punished "with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and

the glory of his power." It is, at least, possible that this may be the truth. The arguments for a righteous government in nature, and for the truth of christianity, have at least force enough to prove that it is not certain but that wickedness will produce the greatest lossess and evils in another world; and that, consequently, there is a real and inconceivable danger attending it. Consider, now, that an upright life is a sure preservative from this danger. If all who forget God, and practise iniquity, are hereafter to be rejected by the Deity, and to be consigned to *everlasting destruction;* if, I say, this should prove to be the truth, the good man will be safe, and the wicked man undone. But should all that reason and christianity teach us on this point prove a delusion; still a good man will *lose* nothing and a bad man will *get* nothing. Nay, a good man, even in this case, will gain a great deal; for he will gain all that satisfaction which goodness generally brings with it in this life, and which vice must want.

Thus you see what security an upright man enjoys. He goes upon even and firm ground. He has on his side all good beings; the convictions of his conscience; the order of nature; and the power of the Deity. It is impossible he should be deceived in thinking, that it is right to adhere inviolably to the laws of righteousness. Should there be that execution of divine justice on wickedness

which we have been taught to expect, he will have nothing to fear. The *worst* that can happen to him is better than the *best* that may happen to an unrighteous man. The *best* that wicked men generally expect is the loss of existence at death; and this is the *worst* that can happen to a good man. But upon the one, it will come after a life of shame, and disease, and folly; and on the other, like sleep at night after a day spent in peace, and health, and honour, and useful labour. I need not tell you what a recommendation this is of a course of uprightness. It is our surest guard in all events; our best shelter against evils under God's government. Safety is what every person, in the common concerns of life, values and seeks. Here alone is it to be found completely and certainly. Nothing but a virtuous conduct can preserve us from the danger of God's displeasure, and of ruin after death. Without it we must stand exposed to the severest calamities that can come upon reasonable beings.

I will conclude this discourse with the following inferences.

First, From all I have said we learn, in the plainest manner, how much we are bound in prudence to walk uprightly. This appears to be prudent, if we regard only our present interest. The way in which an upright man walks (it has been shown) is plain and open. It is so easy to find it,

that we can never swerve from it, while we retain an honest desire to keep in it. It is liable to no hazards; and it is always pleasant and joyous. More *compendious* ways, I have acknowledged, we may sometimes find to wealth and power, but they are full of danger; and he who forsakes integrity in order to go into them, and thus by a short cut to get at worldly advantages, acts like a man who forsakes a quiet and sure path in order to run the risk of being lost among quicksands, or of breaking his neck by going over rocks and precipices. If, therefore, we love prudence, we shall not, in our temporal concerns, ever swerve from uprightness.

But we have reason to apprehend that we shall exist in another state; and if we consider this, we shall be forced to conclude from what has been said, that the prudence of a virtuous course is greater than can be expressed. If this life be not our whole existence, some precautions ought to be used with respect to the state that is to succeed it; and the best precaution is the practice of true piety and goodness. If there be a life to come, it will, in all probability, be a state of retribution, where present inequalities will be set right, and the vicious sink into infamy and misery. The practice of virtue is, in this case, our security. It is the image of the Deity in our souls; and what we ought to reckon upon is, that nothing amiss will ever hap-

pen to it. Let us then adhere to it in all events. Let us endeavour, in this instance, to use the same prudence that the children of the world use in *their* affairs. What pains will they take, and what precautions will they employ, to avoid any dangers which they foresee, or to prevent evils which may possibly come upon them? There is a danger hanging over us, as moral agents, greater than any this world can threaten us with; a danger dreadful and unutterable; the danger of falling into the punishment of sin, and of losing eternal happiness. Were there ever so hard and expensive a method proposed to us of being secured against this danger it would be our wisdom cheerfully to practise it. But true goodness affords us, not a hard and expensive, but a cheap and easy method of being secured against it. Walking uprightly will add to our *present* comfort, at the same time that it will preserve us from *future* danger. What is required of us, in this instance, is only to part with our follies and diseases; and to make ourselves happy *now*, in order to be safe *for ever*.

All I have been saying is true, though there should be the greatest uncertainty with respect to the principles of religion. I have been all along speaking on the supposition of such an uncertainty, in order to set before you, in a stronger light, the wisdom of being virtuous, and the folly of a sinful course. But if we will suppose that there is no

uncertainty: if we will suppose it not only possible, but probable or morally certain, that the principles of religion are true; that Christianity comes from God; and that, agreeably to its assurances, all who are now in their graves shall hereafter "hear the voice of the Son of God, and come forth, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of damnation:" if, I say, we suppose this to be the truth, how great will the wisdom of a virtuous course appear, and how shocking the folly of wickedness?

There are, probably, few speculative and inquiring men, who do not sometimes find themselves in a state of dejection, which takes from them much of the satisfaction arising from their faith in very important and interesting truths. Happy, indeed, is the person who enjoys a flow of spirits so even and constant as never to have experienced this. Of myself I must say, that I have been far from being so happy. Doubts and difficulties have often perplexed, me, and thrown a cloud over truths which, in the general course of my life, are my support and consolation. There are, however, many truths, the conviction of which I never lose.—ONE conviction in particular remains with me amidst all fluctuations of temper and spirits; I mean my belief of the maxim in my text, that he "who walketh uprightly walketh surely." There has not been

a moment in which I have found it possible to doubt, whether the wisest and best course I can take be to practise virtue and to avoid guilt. Low spirits give only new force to this conviction, and cause it to make a deeper impression. Uncertainty in other instances *creates* certainty here; for the more dark and doubtful our state under God's goverment is, the more prudent it must be to choose that course which is the *safest*.

I will only further desire you to consider on this subject, with what serenity of mind a good man may proceed through life. Whatever is true or false, he has the consciousness of being on the *safe* side; and there is, in all cases, a particular satisfaction attending such a consciousness. A man who knows himself in a safe way goes on with composure and boldness. Thus may you go on in a course of well doing. You have none of those calamities to fear to which others are liable. If the doctrines of religion be true, you will be completely happy through the Saviour of mankind. But should they *not* prove true, you will not be worse off than others. I have shewn, on the contrary, that you will still be gainers. Your loss, in short, *can be nothing*. Your gain *may* be *infinite*. Forsake then, every thing to follow righteousness. Never consent to do a wrong action, or to gratify an unlawful passion. This will give you a security that is worth more than all the treasures of the

earth. You may also, on all principles, entertain the *apprehension* that the gospel has given right information concerning the abolition of death, and the happiness reserved for the faithful, in the future kingdom of Jesus Christ. That person must have considered the arguments for Christianity very superficially, who does not see, that they amount to an evidence which is at least sufficient to give a just ground for this *apprehension*; and, consequently, for a *hope* the most animating and glorious. Let us cherish this hope, and endeavour to keep the object of it always in sight. The slightest GLIMPSE of that ETERNAL LIFE which the New Testament promises, is enough to elevate one above this world. The bare *possibility* of losing it by sinful practices is enough to annihilate all temptations. Wherefore, "let us be stedfast and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour" MAY end in a blisssful eternity; but, happen what will, CANNOT "be in vain."

SERMON II.

OF THE HAPPINESS OF A VIRTUOUS COURSE.

PROVERBS iii. 17.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold of her; and happy is every one that retaineth her.

In my last discourse I represented to you the *security* of a virtuous course. In doing this, I was led to touch upon its tendency to make us most *happy* as well as most *secure*, under God's government. I shall now insist more particularly on this subject; and endeavour to give you a distinct account of the principal arguments and facts which prove the happiness of virtue; meaning, on this occasion, chiefly its *present* happiness.

"The ways of wisdom, (my text says) are ways of pleasantness, and happy is every one that retaineth her." Previously to any examination of the *actual* state of mankind, we may perceive a high probability that this assertion must be true. Virtue is the image of God in the soul, and the noblest

thing in the creation; and therefore it must be the principal ground of true happiness. It is the rule by which God meant that we should act; and therefore must be the way to the bliss for which he intended us. That Being who gave us our sense of moral obligations, must have designed that we should conform to them; and he could not design this, and at the same time design that we should find it most for our advantage *not* to conform to them. This would have been to establish an inconsistency in the frame of nature; and acting in a manner which cannot be supposed of that supreme power, which, in every other part of nature, has discovered higher wisdom than we are able to comprehend.

But waving such reasonings, let us apply ourselves to the consideration of the *actual* state of mankind in this respect. And,

First, Let us consider, that by practising virtue we gratify the highest powers in our natures. Our highest powers are, undoubtedly, our sense of moral excellence, the principle of reason and reflection, benevolence to our fellow-creatures, and the love of the Deity. To practise virtue is to act in conformity to these powers, and to furnish them with their proper gratifications. Our other powers being inferior to these, and of less dignity, the happiness grounded upon them is also of an inferior nature, and of less value. Reason is the *nature* of a

reasonable being; and to assert that his chief happiness consists in deviating from reason, would be the same as to say that his chief happiness consists in violating his *nature*, and contradicting *himself*.

Secondly, In connection with this we ought to remember, that virtue, in the very idea of it, implies health and order of mind. The human soul is a composition of various affections standing in different relations to one another; and all placed under the direction of conscience, our supreme faculty. When we are truly virtuous, none of these affections are suffered to err either by excess or defect. They are kept in their proper subordinations to one another. The faculty that was made to govern preserves its authority; and a due balance is maintained among our inward powers. To be virtuous, therefore, is to be in our natural and sound state. It is to be freed from all inward tumult, anarchy and tyranny. It is to enjoy health, and order, and vigour, and peace, and liberty; and, therefore, the greatest happiness. Vice, on the contrary, is slavery, disorder and sickness. It distorts our inward frame, and unsettles the adjustments of our minds. It unduly raises some of our powers, and depresses others. It dethrones conscience, and subjects it to the despotism of blind and lawless appetites. In short, there is the same difference, in respect of happiness, between a virtuous and a vicious soul, as there is between a *distempered* body and a

body that is *well*; or between a civil state, where confusion, faction and licentiousness reign, and a a state where order prevails, and all keep their proper places, and unite in submission to a wise and good legislature.

Again, thirdly; It is worth our consideration, that, by practising virtue, we gain more of the united pleasures, arising from the gratification of *all* our powers, than we can in any other way. That is, in other words, our moral powers, when prevalent, encroach less on the inferior enjoyments of our natures than any of our other powers when *they* are prevalent. In order to explain this, I would desire you to consider, that the course most favourable to happiness must be that which takes from us the least that is possible of any of the gratifications and enjoyments we are capable of. We can take no course that will give us an equal and full share of all the gratifications of our appetites. If we will gain the ends of some of our affections, we must sacrifice others. If, for instance, we will rise to fame and power, we must give up ease and pleasure. We must cringe and truckle, and do violence to some of our strongest inclinations. In like manner, if we make money our principal pursuit, and would acquire wealth, we must often contradict our desires of fame and honour. We must keep down generosity and benevolence, and the love of sensual indulgences. We must pinch, and

toil, and watch, and eat the bread of carefulness. An *ambitious* man must sacrifice the gratifications of the *covetous* man. A *covetous* man likewise, must sacrifice the indulgences of a *man of pleasure*; and a *man of pleasure* those of the *ambitious* and *worldly-minded*. Since, then, in *every* course of life, there is such an interference between the several objects of our affections, that course in which there is the *least* of it, must be likely to make us most happy. And it is certain, that there is less of it in a virtuous course than any other. Virtue brings with it many exquisite pleasures of its own, (as I shall presently observe more particularly) and at the same time, does not necessarily encroach on other sources of pleasure. It is the very best means of obtaining the ends of most of our *lower* powers and affections. It is, for instance, the best means of gaining honour and distinction among our fellow-creatures; for the virtuous man is always the man who is most honoured and loved. It is, likewise, one of the best means of becoming prosperous in our affairs, and gaining a competent share of worldly blessings; for, agreeably to a maxim which we hear often repeated, "honesty is the best policy." A virtuous man is the man who is most industrious, and likely to be most encouraged and trusted in every trade and profession. In short; it is a part of virtue to make use cheerfully of all the materials of happiness with which

divine bounty has supplied us. There is no lawful and natural pleasure of which it does not leave us in possession. It is favourable to every innocent pursuit, and an excellent friend to every just and laudable undertaking.

These observations remove entirely the objection to the happiness of virtue, taken from its requiring labour and circumspection, and obliging us to restrain our passions, and to practise self-denial. It is, indeed, true, that virtue requires this: but you should recollect that it is by no means peculiar to virtue. I have, on the contrary, been showing that it is less applicable to virtue than to any other object of pursuit. What labour and self-denial do men often practise in pursuing fame, or honour, or money! What a sacrifice does the man of pleasure make of his health and fortune; and to what fatigues does he often put himself! It is, therefore, the utmost injustice to virtue to imagine that the restraint of inclination, and the practice of self-denial, are peculiar to it. These are common to virtue and vice, and necessary, whatever course we take. It would be very unreasonable to mention as an objection here, that virtue may oblige us to sacrifice to it even our lives. For this is what happens perpetually in vicious courses. Thousands are every day dying martyrs to ambition, to lust, to covetousness and intemperance. But seldom does it happen, that virtue puts us to any such trial.

On the contrary, its general effect is to preserve and lengthen life.

It ought to be particularly observed on this occasion, that in comparing the influence of different courses on our happiness, we should consider the influence they have on our moral and intellectual powers, as well as our other powers. Conscience is one important part of our natures. To leave it out, therefore, in forming a scheme of enjoyment, or in determining what course will bring us most happiness, would be preposterous and wild. That a course of conduct obliges us to run counter to our sense of moral good and evil, and to give up the satisfactions founded on this sense, ought to be allowed its just weight in judging of the happiness of an agent, and to be considered as a circumstance diminishing his pleasures, in the same manner as if he ran counter to any of his other powers, or gave up any other gratifications. Now, every species of vice interferes directly with our sense of moral good and evil. It gratifies one part of our natures at the expense of our judgment and reason; and this is as much an argument proving its hurtfulness as if it opposed our desires of ease, or honour, or any of our other particular affections. There is, therefore, on this account, a severe and cruel self-denial in vice. At the same time that it encroaches on many of the lower springs of action, it puts a force upon the highest. It obliges us to *deny* our

consciences; and these being most properly *ourselves*, it obliges us to practise a more proper and unnatural self-denial than any denial of passion and appetite.

But, to say no more on this head, what I have meant chiefly to inculcate is, that the course most conducive to happiness must be that which is most agreeable to our *whole* natures; and that this being evidently true of a virtuous course, it follows that it is our greatest happiness.

Hitherto, you have seen that I have argued for the happiness of virtue from the considerations, "that it affords our highest powers the proper gratifications; that it implies health, and liberty, and order of mind; and that it is more agreeable than any other end we can pursue to all the parts of our natures taken as making together one system." There is a great deal more to be said, to which I must request your attention; for,

Fourthly, It deserves your consideration, that much of the pleasure of vice itself depends on some species or other of virtue combined with it. All the joys we derive from friendship, from family-connexions and affinities, from the love and confidence of our fellow-creatures, and from the intercourse of good offices, are properly *virtuous* joys: and there is no course of life which, were it deprived of these joys, would not be completely miserable. The enjoyments, therefore, of vicious men are

owing to the remains of virtuous qualities in them. There is no man so vicious as to have nothing good left in his character; and could we conceive any such man, or meet with a person who was quite void of benevolence, temperance, good-humour, sociableness and honour, we should detest him as an odious monster, and find that he was incapable of all happiness. Wickedness, when considered by itself and in its naked form, without any connexion with lovely qualities, is nothing but shame, and pain, and distress. If the *debauchee* enjoys any thing like happiness, it is because he joins to his debauchery something laudable, and his tender and social feelings are not extirpated. In like manner, if a *covetous* man has any thing besides perplexity and gloominess in his heart, it is because there are some virtues which he practises, or because he disguises his covetousness under the forms of the virtues of prudence and frugality. This then being the case, since even the pleasure that vice enjoys is thus founded upon and derived from virtuous qualities, how plain is it that these constitute our chief good, and that the more of them we possess, so much the more must we possess of the sources of pleasure! The virtuous man is the most generous man, the most friendly, the most good-natured, the most patient and contented. He has most of the satisfactions resulting from sympathy, and humanity, and natural affection; and

so certain is it that such a person must be the happiest, that the wicked themselves, if in any respect happy, can be so only as far as they either *are* the same that he is, or *think* themselves the same.

Fifthly, I have already observed, that virtue leaves us in possession of all the common enjoyments of life. It is necessary now to add, that it goes much beyond this. It not only leaves us in possession of all innocent and natural pleasures, but improves and refines them. It not only interferes *less* with the gratification of our different powers than vice does, but renders the gratification of many of them *more* the cause of pleasure. This effect it produces by restraining us to regularity and moderation in the gratification of our desires. Virtue forbids only the wild and extravagant gratification of our desires; that is, it forbids only such a gratification of them as goes beyond the bounds of nature, and lays the foundation of pain and misery. As far as they were designed by our Maker to yield pleasure, we are at liberty to indulge them; and further we cannot go without losing pleasure. It is a truth generally acknowledged, that the regular and moderate gratification of appetite is more agreeable than any forced and exorbitant gratification of it. Excess in every way is painful and pernicious. We can never contradict nature without suffering and bringing upon ourselves inconveniences. Is there any man to whom food and sleep are so pleasant

as to the temperate man? Are the mad and polluted joys of the fornicator and adulterer equal to the pure and chaste joys of the married state? Do pampered and loaded appetites afford as much delight as appetites kept under discipline, and never palled by riot and licentiousness? Is the vile glutton, the loathsome drunkard, or the rotten debauchee, as happy as the sober and virtuous man, who has a healthful body, a serene mind, and general credit?

Thus is virtue a friend even to appetite. But this is not the observation I intended to insist on. What I meant here principally to recommend to your attention was, that virtue improves all the blessings of life, by putting us into a particular disposition for receiving pleasure from them. It removes those internal evils, which pollute and impair the springs of enjoyment within us. It renders the mind easy and satisfied within itself, and therefore more susceptible of delight, and more open to all agreeable impressions. It is a common observation, that the degree of pleasure which we receive from any objects depends on the disposition we are in to receive pleasure. Nothing is sweet to a depraved taste; nothing beautiful to a distempered eye. This observation holds with particular force in the present case. Vice destroys the relish of sensible pleasures. It takes off (I may say) from the fruit its flavour, and from the rose its hue. It tarnishes the beauty of nature, and communicates

a bitter tincture to every enjoyment. Virtue on the contrary, sweetens every blessing, and throws new lustre on the face of nature. It chases away gloominess and peevishness; and, by strengthening the kind affections, and introducing into the soul good humour and tranquillity, makes every pleasing scene and occurrence more pleasing.

Again, sixthly; Let us consider how many *peculiar* joys virtue has, which nothing else can give. It is not possible to enumerate all these. We may, on this occasion, recollect first those joys which necessarily spring from the worthy and generous affections. The love of the Deity, benevolence, meekness, and gratitude, are by their nature attended with pleasure. They put the mind into a serene and cheerful frame, and introduce into it some of the most delightful sensations. Virtue consists in the exercise and cultivation of these principles. They form the temper and constitute the character of a virtuous man; and therefore he must enjoy pleasures to which men of a contrary character are strangers. It is not conceivable, that a person in whom the mild and generous affections thrive should not be in a more happy state than one who counteracts and suppresses them; and who, instead of feeling the joy which springs up in a heart where the heavenly graces and virtues reside, is torn and distracted by anger, malice, and envy.

But further; Peace of conscience is another

blessing peculiar to virtue. It reconciles us to ourselves as well as to all the world. As nothing can be so horrid as to be at variance with one's self, so nothing can be so delightful as to be at peace with one's self. If we are unhappy within our own breasts, it signifies little what external advantages we enjoy. If we want *our own* approbation, it is of little consequence how much *others* applaud us. Virtue secures to us our own approbation. It reduces to harmony, under the dominion of conscience, all our jarring powers. It makes our reflections agreeable to us; and the mind a fund of comfort to itself.

Again; A sense of God's favour is another source of pleasure which is peculiar to virtue. The Divine government is an object of terror to a wicked man. He cannot think of it without trouble. But a virtuous man derives his chief consolations from hence. He is conscious of acting in concert with the Deity, of obeying his laws, and of imitating his perfections. He, therefore, exults in the assurance of having him on his side, and of being under his Almighty protection. He knows that the Sovereign of the Universe loves him, and is his unalterable friend.

Once more. A virtuous man possesses the hope of a future reward. Every one knows how mighty the power of hope is to invigorate and cheer the mind. There is no such hope as that of the virtu-

ous man. He hopes for a perfect government in the heavens; and this comforts him amidst all the disorders of earthly governments. He hopes for a resurrection from death to a blessed immortality. He expects soon to take possession of a treasure in the heavens that faileth not; to receive an uncorruptible inheritance; to exchange ignorance and doubt for knowledge; and to be fixed in that world where he shall join superior beings, and be always growing more wise, and good, and great, and happy, till some time or other he shall rise to honours and powers which are no more possible to be now conceived by him, than the powers of an angel can be conceived by a child in the womb. This is indeed an unbounded and ravishing hope. If christianity be true, we have abundant reason for it. Christ came into the world to raise us to it; and th most distant glimmering of it is enough to eclipse all the glory of this world.

Such are the singular blessings of the virtuous man.

Let us in the next place, take into consideration some peculiar qualities of the happiness now described. This will complete our view of this subject, and render it unnecessary to add any thing to convince an attentive person of the truth I am insisting upon. Virtue has a great deal of *peculiar* happiness; and that happiness has many excellent qualities, which belong to no other happiness. It is, for instance, more permanent than any other

happiness. The pleasures of the vicious are *transient;* but virtue is a spring of *constant* pleasure and satisfaction. The pleasures which attend the gratification of our appetites soon pall. They are gone for ever after the moment of gratification; and, when carried to excess, they turn to pain and disgust. But nothing like this can be said of the pleasures of virtue. These never cloy or satiate. They can never be carried to excess. They are always new and fresh. They may be repeated as often as we please, without losing their relish. They are such as will not only *bear* repetition and reflection, but are *improved* by them. They will go with us to all places; and attend us through every changing scene of life. No inclosures of stone or iron, no intervention of seas and kingdoms, can keep them from us. They delight alike at home and abroad; by day and by night; in the city and in the desert. The aid of wine and of company is not necessary to enable us to enjoy them. They are, in truth, enjoyed in the greatest perfection, when the mind, collecting itself within itself, and withdrawing itself from all worldly objects, fixes its attention only on its own state and prospects.

It follows from these observations, that the happiness of virtue is the more *independent* happiness than any other. It is, if I may so speak, more *one* with the soul; and, therefore, less subject to the operations of external causes. The pleasure

arising from the consciousness of having done a worthy action, of having relieved a distressed family, or of having subdued our anger, our envy, or our impatience; this is apleasure which enters in to the very substance of the soul, and cannot be torn from it without tearing it from itself, and destroying its existence. All other pleasures are precarious in the highest degree. We have but little power over them; and they may be taken from us, the next moment, in spite of our strongest efforts to retain them. But the joy connected with a right action, with a self-approving heart, and the hope of a glorious eternity, no accidents can take way. These are *inward* blessings which are not liable to be affected by *outward* causes; and which produce a happiness that is immutable, and not possible to be lost, except with our own consent.

There is nothing that the ancient philosophers have taken so much pains to inculcate, as the importance of placing our happiness only in things within our power. If we place it in fame, or money, or any external good, it will have a most deceitful foundation, and we shall be liable to perpetual disappointment: whereas, if we place it in the exercise of virtuous affections, in tranquillity of mind, in regular passions, in doing God's will, and the hope of his favour; we shall have it always at our command. We shall never be liable to disappointments. We shall find

true rest to our souls, and be in a situation like to that of a person lifted to the upper regions of the atmosphere, who hears thunder roll, and see lightnings flash, and the clouds spread below him, while he enjoys serenity and sunshine.

I must add, that the happiness of virtue is a *pure* and *refined* happiness. It is seated in the mind. Other happiness has its seat in the body. It is the happiness of angels. Other happiness is the happiness of brutes. It must, therefore, be also the most solid, the most substantial, and exalted happiness. I observe this, because I believe the generality of men are disposed to look upon no happiness as solid, which is purely spiritual. What I have just said affords a demonstration of the contrary. The most exalted happiness must be that of superior beings, of angels, and of the Deity. But this is a happiness that is spiritual, and which has no connection with the gratifications of sense. The happiness of the virtuous, therefore, being of the same kind, it must be the most real and substantial.

To say no more on this head; Let me desire you to consider, that the happiness of the virtuous man continues with him even in affliction. This is one of the most distinguishing properties of this happiness. Virtue, as it increases the relish of prosperity, blunts likewise the edge of adversity. It is, indeed, in adversity, that the power of virtue to make us happy appears to the greatest advantage.

It kindles a light in the soul in the darkest seasons, and very often produces then the highest bliss when animal nature is at the lowest, and other joys have deserted us. There is, in this respect, a most striking difference between the condition of the virtuous and vicious man. In adversity the vicious man becomes completely wretched. He has no comfortable reflections to support him; no protecting Deity to trust in; no prospect of future blessings to encourage him. Wherever he turns his eyes all is confusion and distress. Reason and conscience have him to themselves, and inflict the sharpest sufferings. But the virtuous man in adversity may rejoice and exult. Whatever he now suffers, he may be assured that all will end happily. When flesh and heart sink under him, faith and hope and charity unite their influence to sustain him. A heavenly voice whispers peace to him, when all about him speaks terror; and the consolations of God delight his soul, when the springs of worldly comfort are dried up. Particularly, in the solemn hour of death he has reason to be composed and cheerful. That is the hour which seals the vicious man under ruin; but it confirms and perfects the happiness of the virtuous man, and sets him free for ever from pain and danger. He can therefore look forward to it without disturbance, and meet it joyfully. Religious and virtuous principles, if they have their due efficacy, will enable us to die with dignity and

triumph. They will change the aspect of the king of terrors into that of a friend and deliverer, and cause us to desire and welcome his stroke.

Thus have I shown you that religious virtue is our chief good. And we may now, with full conviction take up the words of my text, and say with *Solomon*, "That her ways are ways of pleasantness, and that all her paths are peace; that she is a tree of life to them that lay hold of her; and that happy is every one that retaineth her."

I will only further desire your attention to the following inferences.

First. How wrong it is to conceive of religious virtue as an enemy to pleasure! This is doing it the greatest injustice. It is, without all doubt, the very best friend to true pleasure. Were we indeed to judge of it from the stiffness and severity of some who pretend to it, we might be forced to entertain a different opinion of it. But such persons do not show it us in its true form. They mistake its nature, and are strangers to its genuine spirit. One part of the duty it requires of us, is to accept thankfully every innocent gratification of life, and to *rejoice evermore*. Instead of driving us, with the wretched votaries of superstition, into deserts and cloisters, and making us morose and gloomy, it calls us out into society, and disposes us to constant alacrity and cheerfulness.

Secondly. What strong evidence have we for the moral government of the Deity? You have seen that he has so constituted nature that virtue is, by its necessary tendency, our greatest bliss. He is, therefore, on the side of virtue. By establishing the connexion I have been representing between it and happiness, he has declared himself its friend in a manner the most decisive. What we see take place of this connexion in the present life is the beginning of a moral government; and it should lead us to expect a future life, where what is now begun will be completed; where every present irregularity will be set right, virtue receive its *full* reward, and vice its *full* punishment.

Lastly. What reasons have we for seeking virtue above all things? You have heard how happy it will make us. Let us then pray for it earnestly; and despise every thing that can come in competition with it. If we *have* this, we can *want* nothing that is desirable. If we *want* this, we can *have* nothing that will do us any substantial service. Go then, all ye careless and irreligious men. Take to yourselves your money, your honours, and polluted pleasures. I would desire VIRTUE only. There is nothing else worth an eager wish. Here would I centre all my cares and labours. May God grant me this, and deny me what else he pleases! This is his choicest blessing; his best and richest gift. This

is that tree of life whose leaf never withers, and whose fruit will revive us in every hour of dejection, cure all our maladies, and prolong our existence to endless ages; for, as St. Paul speaks, if "we have our fruit unto holiness, our end will be EVERLASTING LIFE."

SERMON III.

ON THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS.

JOHN xi. 43, 44.

And when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice: Lazarus, come forth! And he that was dead came forth bound hand and foot with grave clothes. And his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith to them: Loose him, and let him go.

My design from these words, is to make a few observations on the miraculous fact related in them. This is one of the most remarkable of all our Saviour's miracles. It is related by the apostle John with a simplicity of style, and the main circumstances attending it are told with a minuteness, and, at the same time, a brevity, that cannot but impress an unprejudiced mind. Had a person, who knew he was endeavouring to gain belief to an imposition which he had been concerned in contriving, given us this narrative, it would have been told in a very different manner. It would, probably, have been drawn out to a greater length. No particular mention would have been made of times, places, and persons; and

some affected apologies and colourings would have been introduced to give it a plausibility, and to guard against objections. But, instead of this, we find it a narrative plain and artless in the highest degree, without a circumstance that shows an attempt to give it any dress, or an expression that betrays a design to surprise and deceive. In short; the astonishing miracle, which is the subject of this narrative, is told us exactly as we should expect an honest but unlettered man, who had been familiarized to miracles, to relate a fact of this kind, to which he was conscious of having been an eye and ear witness.

It has been thought strange that the other evangelists have omitted to give us an account of this miracle. Several reasons have been assigned for this omission, which I will just mention to you.

It should be considered, that none of the evangelists appear to have aimed at giving us a complete account of all our Saviour's miracles. It should be considered further, that this miracle was performed in the interval of time between our Saviour's going into the country beyond Jordan, and his going up to his last passover; and that this was a more private part of his ministry, concerning which the other evangelists have said little. But what deserves most to be attended to is, that the evangelists must have felt a particular delicacy with respect to the publication of this miracle. First; because it was a miracle performed on a *friend* in a family with which our Saviour was intimate. And secondly; because Laza-

rus might be still living at the time they wrote their gospels, and might be subjected to great inconveniences by having his name mentioned as the subject of such a miracle. This, however, was a reason which cannot be supposed to have existed when John wrote. There was a tradition among the Fathers, that *Lazarus* lived thirty years after his resurrection; and John did not write his gospel till at least forty or fifty years afterwards. Lazarus, therefore, most probably was not then alive; and John, for this reason, must have been more at liberty to give an account of his resurrection.

It seems proper further to mention here, that St. John, as he wrote last, wrote also on purpose to give a supplement to the other gospels. He had read these gospels; and finding that some important particulars were omitted in them, and others not fully enough related, he composed *his* gospel to supply their defects. John's gospel will appear particularly striking when viewed in this light. Whoever will compare it with the other gospels, must find that he is generally careful to avoid repeating accounts which the other evangelists had given befor him; and that the bulk of it is a relation of facts and instructions about which they have been silent. The account I am now to consider is one instance of this. Though extremely short, considering the magnitude of the fact, it is given us more fully than most of the accounts of Christ's other miracles; and we cannot employ ourselves more profitably than in considering it.

What may be first worthy our notice in this miracle is the character of the person on whom it was performed. Our Saviour had a particular affection for him. He calls him his *friend* in the 11th verse of this chapter, and the message which was sent him to acquaint him with his illness was expressed in these words; *Lord, Behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.* We may well believe, that a person who was thus distinguished must have been endued with some very amiable qualities. John tells us further, that he had two sisters, whose names were *Martha* and *Mary;* and that they lived together in a village called *Bethany,* within fifteen furlongs of Jerusalem. When Lazarus was taken ill, our Saviour was at a considerable distance from *Bethany.* It was natural for *Martha* and *Mary,* knowing the particular affection he had for their brother, to hope that he would exert those miraculous powers by which he had cured others, in recovering this his *friend.* They, therefore, sent to him to inform him of their brother's sickness, hoping that he would soon come to them, and give them relief. But, we are told, that, after receiving the message, he staid *two days* in the place where he was. The reason of this delay was, that he chose Lazarus should die before he got to *Bethany,* because he intended, for the fuller manifestation of his divine mission to raise him from the dead. Had he been on the spot when Lazarus died, he would have suffered, perhaps, some

troublesome importunities; nor, I think, would it have looked so well for him to have permitted Lazarus to die, while he was with him, and after that to raise him from the dead.

Secondly. The HUMILITY which our Lord discovered on this occasion is worth our notice. After staying two days where he was when he received the account of Lazarus's sickness, he told his disciples that he was resolved to go into *Judæa*, and invited them to go with him, informing them, at the same time, of the death of Lazarus. The words in which he gave this information are a little remarkable. Ver. 11. "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, and I go to awake him out of sleep." He does not say, *Lazarus is dead.* That would have been too harsh. Nor does he say, *I go to raise him from the dead, and thus to display my great power.* A deceiver would probably have used some boasting language of this kind. But he, avoiding all ostentation, expresses himself in the gentlest and simplest language, saying only, "that Lazarus was *asleep*, and that he was going to *wake* him." Another circumstance, to the same purpose, is his ordering the stone to be removed from the mouth of the sepulchre, just before he ordered Lazarus to come forth. He might, undoubtedly, have commanded the stone to roll away of itself; and, perhaps, a bold impostor would have been represented as doing this. But our Lord did not multiply miracles needlessly, or do any thing for the

sake only of show and parade. Again; the manner in which he refers this miracle to the will and power of God requires our attention. After the stone was taken away, he made, we are told, a solemn address to God; and, lifting up his eyes, said, "Father, I thank thee, that thou hast heard me." This implies, that his ability to work this miracle was the consequence of his having prayed for it. Throughout his whole ministry he was careful to direct the regards of men to the Deity, as the fountain of all his powers. His language was: "The Father who dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. I can of mine own self do nothing. I came to do the will of him that sent me.

Thirdly: We should take notice in the account of this miracle of the TENDERNESS and BENEVOLENCE of our Saviour's disposition. It is said, that when he saw Mary weeping, and the Jews also weeping, he groaned in his spirit and was troubled.

And it is added, as a circumstance particularly observable, that HE likewise wept. JESUS WEPT. ver. 35. The remarks which, we are told, the spectators made on this, are very natural. Some, imagining that his tears flowed from his concern for the death of his friend, said, "Behold, how he loved him." Others, wondering that, as Lazarus was his friend, he had not exerted the miraculous powers by which he had cured others in curing him, said, "Could not this man, who opened the eyes

of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died." ver. 37. The reason of his weeping could not be his sorrow for the death of Lazarus; for he well knew that he should soon restore him to life; but, most probably, his sympathy with the sorrow of Lazarus's friends, heightened by reflections, to which on this occasion he might be led, on death and its attendant evils. He might, likewise, be much impressed, (as we find he was at other times) by observing the perverseness discovered by some of the Jews who surrounded him, and by his foresight of the calamities that threatened them. We have an account of his weeping on another occasion in Luke xix. 41. where it is said, that when he came near to *Jerusalem*, and beheld it, he *wept* over it. In these instances we see plainly the workings of an ardent benevolence; and we may infer from them that it is by no means below the character of a wise man to be, on certain occasions, so far overcome by his affectionate feelings, as to be forced into tears. This happened to our Saviour on the occasions I have mentioned; and he only appears to us the more amiable for it. Wretched, indeed, is that philosophy which teaches us to suppress our tender feelings. Such a philosophy, by aiming at elevating us above human nature, sinks us below it. Our Saviour was greater than any human being; and yet we find that even he wept. How foolish then would it be in us to

ashamed of any similar tenderness into which we may be forced! A stoical insensibility is certainly rather a vice than a virtue. At no time does a person appear more lovely than when conquered by his kind affections, and melted by them into tears. Let us then learn to despise all pretensions to a wisdom which would take from us any of our natural sensibilities; remembering, however, to keep them always, as far as we can, under proper restraint. It is neither a sin, nor a weakness, to fall into tears; but it is wrong to weep like persons who have no hope, or who are not satisfied with God's will. Our passions have been wisely and kindly given us, and our duty is, not to eradicate, but to regulate them, by so watching over them as never to suffer them to lead us into any excesses that would betray an impotence of mind and a diffidence of Providence.

Fourthly, The DIGNITY of Christ in working this miracle deserves our attention. How great did he appear in his conversation with Martha before he got to the sepulchre: and, particularly, when he declared of himself that he was the RESURRECTION and the LIFE, and that "he who believeth in him, though he were dead, yet shall he live!" How great did he appear when, after addressing himself to the Deity, he cried out with a loud voice at the sepulchre, LAZARUS, COME FORTH! And when, in consequence of this call, *Lazarus* immediately

awoke from death, and shewed himself in perfect health, what a manifestation was this of his glory, and how evidently did it prove that the power of God dwelt in him!

But this leads me to desire you to attend to the assurance this miracle gives us of the divine mission of Christ. We can scarcely conceive a more wonderful exertion of power than the instantaneous restoration to life and health of a person whose body was putrefying in the grave. He that did this must have been sent of God. It is wholly inconceivable that a deceiver should be able to produce such credentials. It is only the power which gave life that can thus restore it, and reunite our souls and bodies after a separation. We may, therefore, assure ourselves, that the person who worked this miracle, and who possessed such an absolute command over nature as Christ discovered, was indeed what he declared himself to be, a Messenger from heaven to save mankind, and that great Messiah, whose coming had been promised from the beginning of the world.

It has been urged by unbelievers, that, granting the reality of miracles, they are no proof of the truth of doctrines, there being no connexion between a display of supernatural power and truth: The stress which unbelievers have laid on this objection is mere affectation. Did they believe the miracles, they would, whatever they pretend, find

themselves under a necessity of receiving the doctrines of Christianity; and it will be time enough to answer this objection, when a man can be found, not a lunatic, who can honestly say, that he believes the miracle in particular which is the subject of this discourse, but does not believe the doctrine which it was intended to prove.

But what deserves more particular notice here is, that it appears from this miracle, that Christ is hereafter to raise all mankind from death. Just before he performed it, Martha having said to him, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died," he told her, in order to comfort her, that her brother should rise again. She, not understanding him, replied, "I know that he shall rise again at the resurrection at the last day;" to which he answered, with a voice of unspeakable dignity, "I am the *Resurrection* and the *Life*. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." That is, "I am the person by whom mankind are to be raised from the dead. It signifies not whether he that is my true disciple is dead or alive. If he is *dead*, he shall live again; and if he is *alive*, his existence shall be continued to him beyond the grave, and his dismission from this world shall be his introduction to a better world, where he shall never die." After making this declaration, and to demonstrate the truth of it by

giving a *specimen* of that power by which he was to effect the universal resurrection, he walked to Lazarus's grave, and raised him from the dead. What evidence could be more decisive? We have in the gospel-history accounts of his raising from the dead two other persons; and, after being crucified and buried, he rose himself from the dead and ascended to heaven. These facts exhibit him to our senses as indeed the RESURRECTION and the LIFE. No doubt can remain of a doctrine thus proved. Give me leave to hold your attention here a little longer. In John v. 25, our Saviour, we are told, said to the Jews, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and NOW IS, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live." Soon after uttering these words he said again, as we read in the same chapter, verse 28, "The hour is coming when all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and shall come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation."

In the circumstances which attended the resurrection of Lazarus, our Saviour seems to have referred to these declarations, and to have intended to verify and exemplify them. He cried, we are told, verse 43, with a loud voice, like, perhaps, to that by which he had said he would hereafter raise all the dead, LAZARUS, *come forth!* and in a mo-

ment he did come forth. Thus will the whole world, at the last day, hear the voice of the Son of God. Thus will he then burst the bars of the grave, rescue from the king of terrors his prisoners, and call to life the dead of all nations, ranks and times. How awful this prospect! How consoling and elevating to good men, amidst the waste that death is continually making around them! What reason have we to value our relation to that deliverer to whom, under God, it is owing! And how ought we to triumph in the assurance he has given us, that though we must soon lose our powers in death, we shall hereafter recover them; spring up from the dust at his command, new-made and improved; and, with all the faithful, enter (not on such a life as that to which *Lazarus* was restored) but on a glorious and endless life in the heavens!

Before I proceed,* I shall here request your attention, while I briefly consider the objections which unbelievers have made to the account given by St. John of this miracle. Sufficient notice has been already taken of several of these objections; but there are some which have not been mentioned, and on which it will not be improper to make a few remarks.

It has been asked, whether there is sufficient reason to believe, that *Lazarus* was *really dead.*

* Here this Sermon was divided into two Sermons

The answer is, that he died, not *suddenly*, but of an illness that increased gradually, and lasted several days; that, in this case, there is no danger of mistaking the signs of death; that his friends had buried him, and, therefore, must have assured themselves of his death; that he had been in his grave four days; and that, had he not been dead, the napkin which, we are told, was tied round his face, and the grave-clothes and filletings with which he was bound, would alone have been sufficient to kill him.

It has been further inquired, how, if he was bound hand and foot, as St. John tells us, he could, on our Saviour's call, come forth out of the grave. The answer is obvious. Upon the supposition of the reality of the miracle, there can be no difficulty in conceiving it carried so far, as not only to bring Lazarus to life, but to present him also out of the grave before the spectators. But were it necessary to suppose the miracle not carried thus far, the objection would deserve little regard, because founded on an ignorance of the manner of burying among the ancients. The graves amongst the Jews and other nations in former times, were caves hewn out of rocks, in the sides of which the dead, after being embalmed, were deposited without coffins. When, therefore, by our Saviour's order, the stone was taken away from the mouth of Lazarus's sepulchre, it is possible that his corpse might be

exposed to view; and when it is said that he "came forth bound hand and foot," the meaning may be, not that he walked out of the sepulchre, but that he raised himself up in the side of the cave or cell where he was laid, and slid down from it upon his feet, and there continued till he was unbound and could walk about.

But the chief difficulty, which occurs in considering the account of this miracle, is the effect which, we are told, it had on the chief-priests and pharisees. Instead of being properly impressed by it, we read, verse 53, that, after taking council together, they determined to use all possible means to put Jesus to death. They even went so far as to think of measures for putting *Lazarus* himself to death. Similar to this, according to the gospel-history, was the general conduct of the leading Jews with respect to our Lord. Instead of being engaged by the encreasing glory of his character, and the overpowering evidence of his miracles, to submit to him, they were only stimulated to greater rage, and made more desperate in their resolution to crush him: and this may seem a pitch of wickedness so diabolical, as to exceed the limits of human depravity, and, therefore, to be incredible. I am in hopes, however, that you will think otherwise, when you have attended to the following observations.

It is a previous observation necessary to be attended to, that the Jewish rulers appeared to have

been convinced of the supernatural power and prophetical character of our Lord. This the gospel-history plainly tells us, John xii. 42. "Among the chief rulers also many believed on him, but did not confess him, because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." "We know," says Nicodemus (the ruler who came to Jesus by night,) "that thou art a teacher come from God, for no one can do the miracles thou dost, except God be with him." John iii. 2. On hearing the report of this miracle in particular, the language of the chief-priests and pharisees was; "What do we? for this man doth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him." John xi. 47. When we read, that they did not believe in him, the meaning is, that they did not *receive* him and *submit* to him as a messenger from heaven; and what, therefore, is to be accounted for is, not so much their want of faith in him, as their rejection and persecution of him notwithstanding their faith.

In order to explain this, I would desire you to consider,

First, The general character of the Jews. In every age they had been infamous for their persecution of the prophets who were sent to them. About this time, more especially, it appears that they were arrived at a pitch of wickedness which went beyond common depravity. *Josephus* says, "that "he believed there never existed, from the begin-

" ning of the world, a generation of men more " profligate than the body of the Jewish leaders " and nobility were at the time Jerusalem was be- " sieged by the Romans ;" And if they were then so vicious, it is not likely they were of a different character forty years before, when our Lord preached to them.

Secondly ; The provocation our Lord gave them should be considered. It is remarkable, that it does not appear that he ever expressed himself with particular warmth except when he spake of these men. Against the scribes and pharisees we find him always declaring a most pointed and irreconcileable indignation. He charged them with being guilty of almost every vice that could stain a human character; and, particularly, with religious hypocrisy, doing all their good works to be seen of men; pretending uncommon sanctity, and making long prayers, but devouring widows' houses ; straining at a gnat, but swallowing a camel; careful not to omit any punctilio of a ceremony, and paying tithe of mint, anise, and cummin, but neglecting the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy, and fidelity; binding heavy burthens on others, which they would not touch with one of their fingers ; compassing sea and land to make one proselyte, who, when made, became tenfold more a child of hell than themselves ; claiming an absolute authority over the consciences of the people,

while they taught for doctrines the commandments of men, and corrupted the law of God; loving greetings in the markets, and the chief seats in synagogues, and studying (by going about in long robes, praying in the corners of the streets, sounding a trumpet when they gave alms, and enlarging the borders of their garments) to appear *outwardly* righteous, while *inwardly* they were like whited sepulchres, full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness. In short, their character, according to our Lord's representation of it, was completely detestable; and, perhaps, the account we have of it has been providentially given us to prevent our wondering at the violence of their opposition to our Saviour, notwithstanding all they saw and knew of his miraculous powers. He even declared a preference to them of publicans and sinners, of thieves and harlots, who, he assured them, were more likely to enter into the kingdom of the Messiah than they were.

His discourse in the 23d chapter of Matthew is particularly worth your attention on this occasion. In this discourse he denounces the judgments of heaven upon them for their wickedness, calling them blind guides, and a generation of vipers who could not escape the damnation of hell. He pronounces seven times the words, WOE UNTO YOU, SCRIBES AND PHARISEES, HYPOCRITES! and concludes with saying, 'there was no remedy for

them, but that *on them would come all the righteous blood which had been shed from the beginning of the world*; that is, a punishment so dreadful as to bear to be so expressed. Thus did he hold them up to public detestation as enemies to the progress of truth and virtue, and a body of pious knaves destined to destruction: and the effect must have been the ruin of their credit and authority. Could there have been a provocation more intolerable? In truth, the wonder is, that they bore him so long as they did; and the probability is, that they would have brought him to a quicker end, had it not been for an awe produced in their minds by the splendour of his miracles, united to their apprehensions of danger from the people, who, we are informed, all took him for a prophet, and were ready for a revolt in his favour.

But let us further consider what they must have done, and how much they must have relinquished, had they submitted to him. They must have made themselves the disciples of the son of a carpenter, followed by twelve mean fishermen, without state or pomp, or even a place in which to lay his head. They must have descended from their seats of power and influence, and placed themselves under the direction of an enemy who had unmasked and exposed them, and from whom they could expect no mercy. But above all, they must have acknowledged themselves the wicked wretches he had declared them to

be, and given up their ambition, their hypocrisy, and their vices. Is it strange, that even miracles, whatever conviction they might extort, did not produce this effect? Perhaps, indeed, there is not *now* a country under heaven, in which, in similar circumstances, our Lord would not meet with similar treatment. Suppose, for instance, that in ITALY a prophet was to arise and to go about preaching repentance to the inhabitants; calling them from the worship of the host, of images, the virgin Mary, and the saints, to the worship of one God; reprobating popery as a system of superstition and spiritual fraud and domination, injurious to the essential interests of men, by teaching a way of being religious without being virtuous, and of getting to heaven without forsaking vice; and, at the same time, delivering woes against the public teachers and rulers, as hypocritical corruptors of true religion, as supporters of idolatary and falsehood, and enemies to the improvement and happiness of mankind. Suppose, I say, this now to happen in ITALY; what can you imagine would be the effect? What evidence would be sufficient to engage the pope, the cardinals, and the different orders of priests, to listen to such a preacher, and acknowledge his authority; to renounce their usurped honours and dignities; to give up the abuses to which they owed their wealth and their consequence, and to reform their doctrine and man-

ners? Would not the whole force of clerical and civil power be exerted to silence and crush him as soon as possible? Would miracles themselves, unless employed for the purpose of protecting him, long preserve him? Would he be perfectly safe, even in *this* country, were he to come to us, and to attack established corruptions, provoke the vicious in high places, and unmask religious prevaricators, the supporters of abuses, and the enemies of reformation, in the manner our Lord did in *Judea?*

The observation I am now making has been verified by the experience of all past ages. Such is the power of criminal prejudices, and such the stubbornness and often the fury of vicious men interested in maintaining abuses, that reformers however powerful their admonitions have been and eminent their characters, have seldom long escaped persecution and violent deaths. Provocations, unspeakably less than those given to the Jews by our Saviour, have every where produced the same effects; in ATHENS, the poisoning of SOCRATES; in BRITAIN, the burning of CRANMER, LATIMER, RIDLEY, &c.

But this is by no means all that is to be said in answer to the objection I am considering. In our Lord's circumstances with respect to the Jews, there was much that was peculiar, and that can never again exist in any country. In order to understand this, you must recollect, that all the Jews were,

in the time of our Saviour, eagerly and impatiently looking for the Messiah promised in their sacred writings; and that the only notion they had of this Messiah was*, that he would be a temporal prince and a great conquerer, who would come with a train of splendid courtiers and signs in the heavens, set himself at the head of a mighty army, deliver them from the Roman yoke, restore them to their long lost liberty, and elevate them to the sovereignty of the world. Their leading men, in particular, reckoned on being the most favoured men in his kingdom, on having their consequence among the people confirmed and enlarged, and enjoying in the greatest abundance pleasures, preferments, honours, and riches. When, therefore, they heard the fame of Jesus, and saw the displays of his supernatural power, they could not but be led to conclude that he might prove the Messiah, or, at least, that the nation would take him to be so; and, as he had avowed himself their adversary, this would necessarily alarm them. It was impossible they should not dislike *such* a Messiah; a Messiah who was continually warning the people against them,

* This opinion was not confined to the Jews. "There had been, Suetonius tells us (Vespas. cap. 4), THROUGH ALL THE EAST, an ancient and constant expectation, that at that time some one from *Judea* should obtain the empire of the world."

and who had sunk their credit; a Messiah who made humility, self-denial, repentance, and heavenly-mindedness, the conditions of his favour; a Messiah who publicly threatened them, who had pronounced them the worst of mankind, and declared that, instead of sharing in the happiness of the Messiah's reign, they would be excluded from it, become victims of divine justice, and suffer a punishment sharper than any that had been ever inflicted.

It is true that, with wonderful prudence, he avoided declaring himself the Messiah. The effect of such a declaration would have been producing tumults; which must have defeated his views. The proper time for this was after his departure from this world, when it would be impossible to mistake it for a call to rebellion. But the rulers of the Jews must have expected that he would soon quit his reserve, publish his pretensions, and set up his standard; and the more he distinguished himself, the more they must have apprehended that he might do this with a success that (either by enabling him to execute his threats, or by bringing the Roman power upon them) would occasion their ruin. Thus circumstanced, every miracle he wrought, every testimony he received of popular favour, and every display he made of his prophetical character, could, in their depraved minds, have no other effect than to increase their alarm, to work them up to greater

violence, and to render them more desperate in their attempts to provide for their own security by destroying him.

Our Lord's parable of the vineyard let out to unfaithful husbandmen, delivered not long before his crucifixion, affords a particular confirmation of these observations. In this parable he intimates to the chief priests and elders of the people, that in spite of all their efforts he should rise to universal power; and that the consequence would be, his falling upon them (like a great corner stone) and grinding them to powder. And we are told that they understood his meaning, and were so exasperated by it, that they endeavoured immediately to seize him, but were deterred by the people. See the 21st chapter of Matthew, from the 25th verse to the end.

In short; Jesus, after raising *Lazarus* from the dead, became possessed of an influence among the people, which would, had he availed himself of it, have been irresistable. They * were ripened by it for an insurrection, and the slightest encouragement

* The disposition of the Jews, at this time, to rise in favour of every pretender who offered himself to them as the temporal deliverer they expected in the Messiah, is well known. It was this chiefly, as Josephus says, that produced the war which ruined them; and it was our Lord's disappointing their views, by refusing to be made a king, and suffering

would have brought them together to fight under him, and to proclaim him their great Messiah. The hypocrites, whom, in the tone and with the authority of a prophet sent from God, he had *proscribed*, could not observe this without terror. Their danger appeared to be increasing with every increase of his popularity, and growing more imminent in proportion to the proofs he gave of his divine mission. They could not but reckon, that as he rose they must sink; and that either *he* or *they* must perish. This produced a contest, singular and unparelleled. Our Lord gave it up by yielding to their power. It was a great mistake to think, that his kingdom was a temporal kingdom, or that he had any worldly views. He did not come for slaughter and triumph like the savage conquerers of this world, but to suffer and to

himself to be taken and condemned, that made the people turn at last against him.

"The Jewish people," says Dr. Lardner, in his Collection of Jewish and Heathen Testimonies to the Truth of Christianity, chap. iii. sect. 7. "had met with many disappointments from our Lord; and yet, when he entered into Jerusalem in no greater state than riding on an ass, they accompanied him with loud acclamations, saying, "Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is the king who cometh in the name of the Lord!" And Jesus' not assuming then the character of an earthly prince was a fresh disappointment to them, and left deep resentments."

die; and it was necessary that his death should be a *public* death. His own resurrection (the ground of all human hope) could not otherwise have been properly ascertained. He, therefore, made a voluntary surrender of himself to his enemies; and, to fulfil the councils of Providence*, submitted to be publicly condemned and crucified.

These observations seem to be a full answer to the objection I have stated: and they explain what is said in Matt. xxvii. 18. that it was from ENVY the

* Their success in taking and condemning him led them to conclude they had obtained a complete victory over him, and had delivered themselves from the danger with which he had threatened them. But the events which soon followed proved the contrary. He rose to all power in heaven and earth; and, in a few years after this, sent his armies to destroy these murderers. Vengeance came upon them to the uttermost; and his prophetical denunciations were fully verified. *Josephus* tells us that twelve thousand of the Jewish nobility perished at the siege of *Jerusalem*; that the vengeance of heaven appeared plainly to be upon them; and that, in his opinion, all the calamities which had ever happened to any people from the beginning of the world were not to be compared with those which befel the Jews at this time. Multitudes, he says, were crucified by the *Romans* before the walls; and so great was the number of those who thus suffered, that room was wanting for crosses, and crosses were wanting for bodies.

chief priests and pharisees had delivered him; that is, from a jealousy of his popularity, and a dread of its effects; and, also, what we are told (in a passage already quoted) these chief priests said, on hearing of the resurrection of Lazarus, "What do we? for this man doth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation." John xi. 47, 48.

There are two reflections which are naturally suggested to us by these observations.

First; We should consider how striking a proof they give us of the truth of our religion. Had Christ been a deceiver, he would have fallen in with the prejudices of his countrymen; he would have offered himself to them as just the Messiah they expected and wanted: for it was only in the scheme of such a Messiah the views of a deceiver could be gratified. He would have endeavoured to ingratiate himself with the chief priests and rulers, encouraged their ambition, and flattered their vices. You have heard how differently he acted; how he provoked instead of soothing the Jewish rulers, and threatened instead of flattering them; and thus made himself odious and terrible to them in the highest degree. There cannot be a stronger argument for his divine mission. If there be any person who does not feel the weight of it, he must be either very much prejudiced, or very inattentive.

Secondly; We are led, by the observations I

have made, to reflect on the wisdom of divine providence, in ordering the circumstances which attended the introduction of christianity into the world. Had the body of the Jewish leaders and priests (and consequently the nation in general) received Christ, the evidences of our religion would have been much diminished; a suspicion would have been unavoidable, that it was an imposition contrived by the Jews, and which had made its way in the world by the power and policy* of the Jewish state.

* "Had the great body of your nation, and especially the rulers of it in the time of Christ, embraced christianity, as it was a religion which sprang up among yourselves, it would have been said at this day, that it was a contrivance of those who had it in their power to impose upon the common people, and to make them believe whatever they pleased, and that your scriptures, which bear testimony to Christ, had been altered to favour the imposture. Whereas the violent opposition which your nation in general, and the rulers of it, made to christianity, will for ever put it out of the power of unbelievers to say that it was a scheme which the founders of it carried on in concert with any human powers." See the Letters addressed to the Jews by *Dr. Priestley*, in which, with a force of persuasion they ought to feel, he invites them to an amicable discussion with him of the evidences of christianity. Fifth Letter, p. 45.

But I have gone far beyond the bounds I intended in speaking on this subject.

Let us now pause a moment, and endeavour to bring back our thoughts to the resurrection of *Lazarus*. Never, except when Jesus himself rose from the dead, was a scene so interesting exhibited on the stage of this world. The consideration of it should engage us to exercise faith in Christ as our Saviour, and to rely on his power to deliver us from the all-devouring grave. His exhortation to his apostles just before his last suffering was; "Ye believe in God: Believe also in me." Thus also, in his words, would I now exhort you. "Ye believe in God." He is the ONE SUPREME, and the cause of all the causes of your happiness. "But believe also in Christ." He is the one mediator, and the chosen minister of God's goodness to you. "As in Adam all die; so in him shall all be made alive." 1 Cor. xv. 22. Soon he will descend again from heaven, not to labour and to suffer, but to gather the fruits of his labours and sufferings; not to die, but to destroy death and to "change these our vile bodies that they may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to that mighty power by which he is able to subdue all things to himself. Phil. iii. 21. "As the father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." John v. 26. We have been contemplating a striking proof of this. As his call brought Lazarus to life; so will it, hereafter bring to life

you and me and all mankind. At his coming "the sea shall give up the dead that are in it, and death and the invisible state shall give up the dead that are in them. He shall sit on the throne of his glory, and before him shall be gathered all nations to to be judged according to their works. He shall separate them as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. The righteous he shall place on his right hand; the wicked on his left. To the former he will say; Come ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world! To the latter, Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!" God grant, fellow-christians, that we may be prepared for this solemn time! A step more may bring us to it. Death is pressing hard towards us; and when it comes the curtain will drop which hides from our view another world, and these scenes will open upon us. The intervening time of lying amongst the dead our imaginations are apt greatly to misrepresent. There may be, to our perceptions, no difference whether it be four days, as in the case of Lazarus, or a thousand ages. Let us then be stedfast in every good purpose, never, while in the way of our duty, desponding under any troubles, or weeping as without hope, forasmuch as we know "that our Redeemer liveth, and will stand at the latter day on the earth; and that, though our bodies must putrify in the ground, and worms devour them, yet in our flesh we shall see God." Job xix. 26.

And now, before I dismiss you, let me desire you to join with me in taking one more view of what passed at Lazarus's grave. It is pleasing in the highest degree to set before our imaginations that scene. Christ declares himself the resurrection and the life, and then walks to the grave. In his way to it (observing the sorrow of Lazarus's friends, and reflecting on the calamities of human nature) he falls into tears. When arrived at it, he orders the stone at the mouth of it to be taken away; and (in answer to Martha, who objected that the smell would be offensive) he says, that if she believed, she should see the glory of God. He solemnly addresses the Deity, and thanks him for hearing him: the spectators stand around big with expectation. He cries with a loud voice, "Lazarus come forth!" Immediately he came forth, and shewed himself alive. Conceive, if you can, the astonishment this produced. Think, particularly, of the emotions of Lazarus's friends. What delight must they have felt! How joyful must it have been to Martha and Mary to receive their beloved brother from the dead! With what ecstacies must they have embraced him, and welcomed him to the light of life! How, probably, did they fall down before Jesus in gratitude and wonder!

But let not our thoughts stop here. Let us carry them on to the morning of the universal resurrection. What happened now was a faint resemblance of what

will happen then. How gladly will virtuous men open their eyes on that morning, and hail the dawning of an endless day! With what rapture will they then meet, congratulate one another on their escape from danger and trouble, and unite their voices in praising their Deliverer! What will be their joy to exchange corruption for incorruption, and weakness for power; to take leave of sin and sorrow, and lose all their maladies; to throw off their fetters, recover perfect health and liberty, mount up on high *to meet the Lord in the air*, and draw immortal breath!

Oh! blessed period! Come, Lord Jesus! come quickly! And when thy voice shall hereafter awake all the dead, may we find this happiness ours, and be taken, with all we have loved here, to live with thee for ever!

SERMON IV.

THE IMPORTANCE AND EXTENT OF FREE INQUIRY IN MATTERS OF RELIGION.

[Preached November 5, 1785.]

MATTHEW xiii. 9.

He that hath ears to hear let him hear.

In these words our Lord several times addressed his audience, in order to summon their utmost attention to his doctrine. It was a call to make use of their reason, in a case in which it was of the greatest consequence to apply it, and in which they were likewise capable of applying it with the greatest effect, viz. the investigation of religious truth. "Hear and understand" is another of his modes of calling the attention of his audience to the instruction that he gave them. And when he thought them deficient in their attention to his doctrine, and they did not appear to understand what he laid before them, he was not backward even in his reproaches on that account. "Are ye yet also without understanding? Do ye not yet understand?" His language

that he once made use of; evidently implying some degree of surprize and displeasure. Matt. xv. 16, 17. And even in a case of considerable difficulty, viz. the right application of scripture prophecies, he said to the two disciples going to Emmaus, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" Luke xxiv. 25.

The apostles continued the same earnest addresses to the reason of their converts; and Paul in particular, gave the greatest exercise to the understandings of his hearers and readers, by very abstruse argumentation on subjects relating to religion. His epistles to the Romans, to the Galatians, and to the Hebrews, are chiefly argumentative; and those to the Corinthians, and some others, are very much so. For, after the death of our Saviour, new cases had occurred, and new difficulties had arisen, for which the instructions he had given them were not sufficient. And had the apostles continued to live to the present day, other cases would, no doubt, have occurred, in which their own reasoning powers, and those of their disciples, would have found continual exercise.

Indeed, it seems to be the design of providence that the present state should be a theatre of constant exercise and discipline, and that not of our passions only, but also of our understandings, that we may make continual advances in knowledge, as well as in virtue; to prepare us, no doubt, for our proper

sphere of action in a future world; in which, we may assure ourselves, we shall find abundant exercise, as for the moral virtues that we acquire here, so also for that habit of patient inquiry, and close investigation of truth, and likewise that candour with respect to those that differ from us, which it is our duty to acquire and cultivate here below.

Man is a creature whose distinguishing excellence is the reason which God has given him, no less than his capacity for moral virtues. The perfection of man, therefore, must consist as well in the improvement of his reason, and the acquisition of knowledge, as in the attainment of all moral virtue. We should then always keep our attention awake to every interesting subject of discussion; and, whenever religious truth is directly or indirectly concerned, imagine that we hear our Saviour himself calling out to us and saying, "He that hath ears to hear let him hear."

The subject of *free inquiry*, I am well aware, is a very trite one, and especially as one of the usual topics on the Fifth of November, on which it is customary to call the attention of protestants to the use of their reason in matters of religion, in order to vindicate the principles of the Reformation; and also further to assert our liberty of dissenting from the established religion of this country. This has been done so often that many persons may think it a worn-out and useless topic. They may think

that the reformation has been abundantly vindicated, and that now we have nothing to do but to rejoice in that liberty in which the exertions of our ancestors, and the favour of Divine Providence, have made us free. Dissenters also may think the principles of their dissent from the Establishment of their country sufficiently vindicated, and that now we have nothing to do but joyfully to acquiesce in our greater liberty; only being ready to oppose all attempts that may be made to encroach upon it.

This, however, is the language of those who think they have acquired all useful religious knowledge; whereas it is probable that this will never be the situation of man, no, even in a future world, and much less in this. In nature we see no bounds to our inquiries. One discovery always gives hints of many more, and brings us into a wider field of speculation. Now, why should not this be, in some measure, the case with respect to knowledge of a moral and religious kind? Is the compass of religious knowledge so small, as that any person, however imperfectly educated, may comprehend the whole, and without much trouble? This may be the notion of such as read or think but little on the subject. But of what value can such an opinion be?

If we look back into ecclesiastical history (which is itself a study no less useful than it is immense, and despised by none but those who are ignorant of

it), we shall see that every age, and almost every year, has had its peculiar subjects of inquiry. As one controversy has been determined, or sufficiently agitated, others have always arisen; and I will venture to say there never was a time in which there were more, or more interesting objects of discussion before us, than there are at present. And it is vain to flatter ourselves with the prospect of seeing an end to our labours, and of having nothing to do but to sit down in the pleasing contemplation of all religious truth, and reviewing the intricate mazes through which we have happily traced the progress of every error.

If, indeed, we confine ourselves to things that are *necessary to salvation*, we may stop whenever we please, and may even save ourselves the trouble of any inquiry, or investigation at all: because nothing is absolutely necessary to acceptance with God, and future happiness, in some degree, besides the conscientious practice of the moral duties of life. "What doth the Lord thy God require of thee but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" But, certainly, we may mislead ourselves if we restrict our inquiries by this rule, as, according to it, christianity itself may be said to be unnecessary: for do any of us think that a virtuous heathen will not be saved? Paul says that they who are without the law of Moses shall be judged without that law. They have

the law of nature and of conscience, and will be judged by that. But, notwithstanding this, he thought it a great privilege to be a Jew, and a greater still, as it certainly is, to be a Christian; and there were questions relating to christianity, to which he thought it proper to give his own closest attention, and to invite the attention of others. The manner in which he addresses the Galatians, the Corinthians, and the christians of other churches, on the subject of *false doctrine*, is equal in point of energy with the language of our Saviour, "he that hath ears to hear let him hear;" and that of the apostle John, in whose time error had spread wider, and taken deeper root, is still stronger. Do not these great examples then justify the most vigilant attention that we can now give to the purity of christian doctrine?

As new errors and mistakes are continually arising, it is of importance that these be corrected, even to keep the ground that we have already got; and it may well be presumed that the great corruption in doctrine, discipline, and worship, which began in the very age of the apostles, and which kept advancing for the space of near fourteen hundred years afterwards, may furnish matter for the laborious and spirited inquiries of a later period than our's. We have seen, indeed, the *dawn* of a reformation, but much remains to the light of *perfect* day; and there is nothing that we can now al-

ge as a plea for discontinuing our researches, that might not have been said with equal plausibility at the time by Wickliff, by Luther, or by later reformers, who stopped far short of the progress which you who now hear me have made. We think that they all left the reformation very imperfect, and why may not our posterity think the same concerning us? What peculiar right have we to say to the spirit of reformation, *So far shalt thou go and no farther.*

Luther and Calvin reformed many abuses, especially in the discipline of the church, and also some gross corruptions in doctrine; but they left other things of far greater moment, just as they found them. They disclaimed the worship of saints and angels, but they retained the worship of Jesus Christ, which led the way to it, which had the same origin, and which is an equal infringement of the honour due to the supreme God, who has declared that he will not give his glory to another. Nay, the authority of the names of those reformers, who did not see this and other great errors, now serves to strengthen and confirm them: for those doctrines of original sin, predestination, atonement, and the divinity of Christ, which deserve to be numbered among the grossest of all errors, are even often distinguished by the appellation of *the doctrines of the reformation*, merely because they were not reformed by those who have

got the name of *the reformers;* as if no others could have a right to it but themselves; whereas, excepting the doctrine of *atonement* (which in its full extent was an error that originated with the reformers themselves, who were led into it by an immoderate opposition to the popish doctrine of merit), they are, in fact, the doctrines of the church of Rome, which Luther and Calvin left just as they found.

It was great merit in them to go so far as they did, and it is not *they* but *we* who are to blame, if their authority induce us to go no further. We should rather imitate them in the boldness and spirit with which they called in question and rectified so many long-established errors; and, availing ourselves of their labours, make further progress than they were able to do. Little reason have we to allege their name, authority and example, when they did a great deal, and we do nothing at all. In this we are not imitating *them* but those who opposed and counteracted them, willing to keep things as they were, among whom many were excellent characters, whose apprehensions at that day were the very same with those of many very good and quiet persons at present, viz. the fear of *moving foundations*, and overturning christianity itself. Their fears, we are now all sensible, were groundless; and why may not those of the present age be so too?

Dissenters, who have no creeds dictated to them

by any civil governors, have, nevertheless, at this day no less need of such admonitions as these than members of established churches; because they may have acquired as blind an attachment to the systems in which they were educated as the members of any establishment whatever, and may be as averse to any further improvement. Indeed a similar temper is necessarily produced in similar circumstances, while human nature is the same in us all; and therefore a person educated a dissenter may be as much *a bigot* as any person educated a churchman, or a papist; and if he now be what he was brought up to, the probability certainly is, that, had he been educated differently, his prejudices would have been no less strong, though entirely different; so that the rigid dissenter would have been as rigid a papist or a churchman.

No person whose opinions are not the result of his own serious inquiry can have a right to say that he is a dissenter, or any thing else, *on principle*; and no man can be absolutely sure of this, whose present opinions are the same with those that he was taught, though he may think, and be right in thinking, that he sees sufficient reason for them and retains them on conviction. This, however, is all that can be expected of any man; for it would be most absurd for a man to adopt new opinions, opinions entertained by no person besides himself, merely for the sake of proving that he has actually

thought for himself. But still, thinking as others have thought, and for reasons which others have given, is no *proof* of a man having thought for himself, and therefore will not authorize his censuring of others. Such a person *may* have the true spirit of inquiry, he may have exerted it, and have found the truth; but he is incapable of giving that satisfactory *evidence* of it, which can be given by one, whose present sentiments are different from those in which he was educated, and which he could not have learned but from his own researches.

How few then of those of you who were educated dissenters can have a right to say, that you would have been dissenters if you had *not* been so educated! It is more than I would presume to say concerning myself. If those persons who now dislike the spirit of innovation were to go back in history, and place themselves in every age of reformation; still censuring that spirit which always gave offence in its day (being always the rebellion of *a few* against the authority of *the many*); they could not stop till they came to the heathenism of our barbarous ancestors: for it was the bold spirit of inquiry that made them christians.

Let all those who acquiesce in any system in which they were educated, or which they have learned from others, consider that, in censuring more modern innovators, they are censuring the *spirit* and *example* of the very persons whose opinions

they have adopted, and of whose name they make their boast; and that if it had not been for that very spirit which they now censure, only exerted a century or two ago, their own opinions would have been very different from what they now are. They ought, therefore, to respect the *principle*, even though it should lead some into error. If the spirit of inquiry that carries some to Socinianism be wrong, that which carries others to Arianism is no less so; and if Arminius is to be condemned for abandoning the doctrine of Calvin, Calvin himself must be condemned for abandoning the doctrines of popery. It is the *spirit of inquiry*, which if error be established necessarily leads to *innovation*, that every man, who ranks himself with any class of christians now existing, must commend in some person or other: and if it was really commendable in the person, whose opinions he adopts, it cannot be censurable in the person, whose opinions he does not choose to adopt. The same spirit of inquiry is in itself equally commendable, or equally censurable in all, and whether it lead to truth or to error.

It will be said, Is it not possible for the spirit of inquiry and innovation to be carried too far? Does liberty never degenerate into licentiousness? Admiting this, who is the proper judge in the case, when all are equally *parties*? The Papist will say that the Protestant has gone too far, the Calvinists will say that the Arminians are to blame, Arminians will

condemn the Arians, and the Arians the Unitarians, and even some Unitarians may condemn those of their body, who, differing from them in some respects, have not as yet got, but may hereafter get, some other name.

In fact, there is no reason to be alarmed at all in the case. Truth will always have an infinite advantage over error, if free scope be given to inquiry. It is very little advantage that any superiority of ability can give to the cause of error, and it cannot be of long continuance; not to say that the probability must always be, that a man of superior ability will discover the truth sooner than one of inferior talents; industry, and all other qualities being equal between them.

But the consideration that will perhaps contribute most to allay the apprehensions of serious and well-intentioned persons, with respect to all theological controversies, is, that nothing on which future happiness depends is concerned in any of them. Much more than has yet been called in question may be given up without abandoning christianity; and every thing that has yet been done towards stripping our religion of its foreign incumbrances has contributed to make many value it the more, and consequently, by giving it a firmer hold on men's understanding and belief, tends to give it a greater influence over their affections and practice.

There are, likewise, some other considerations,

by means of which those persons who are not themselves much given to speculation, and who are apt to be alarmed by the suggestions of others, may relieve themselves from the fears they entertain on these occasions. One is, that no principle or tenet is really dangerous that does not affect men's belief in the righteous moral government of God, and a state of rewards and punishments hereafter; because this is that religious principle which has the greatest influence on the conduct of men. Other principles indeed, have an effect, in contributing to make us regard our Governor and Judge, and the maxims of his administration, with more satisfaction, and therefore may make religious obedience more pleasing, and they deserve our zeal and attachment on that account. Other principles again tend to make our religion approve itself to the reason of mankind, by removing from it what is manifestly absurd, or highly improbable and revolting; and therefore may recommend christianity to those who are at present prejudiced against it, and they deserve a large portion of our zeal on that account. But still the great thing, with respect to the professor of christianity himself, is his firm belief in a righteous moral government, and a future state of retribution; because these are the things that chiefly influence men's conduct.

In reality, there cannot be any better rule of judging in this case than that of our Saviour, "By their fruits ye shall know them." Consider then the

tempers and conduct of those persons whose opinions are said to be dangerous. Are they worse than other persons? Have they less piety towards God, or less good-will to men, or are they more indulgent to their appetites and passions? If this cannot be said of them, but on the contrary their conduct be as unexceptionable and exemplary, as that of other christians, assure yourselves that there is no more real danger in their principles than in those of others. They cannot be bad principles with which men lead godly, righteous, and sober lives.

I do not, however, desire you to be determined by the observation of a single person, or of a few persons; because there may be causes of their good conduct independent of their principles, as there may be causes of bad conduct in those who hold good principles. But observe the general character of the sect, or denomination, whose principles are censured; and if it be not worse than that of others, assure yourselves that, whatever may be the vices or virtues of individuals, the general principles of the sect are not more unfavourable to virtue than those of other christians; and, therefore, that there is nothing in them that ought to give you any alarm.

But if, independant of practical consequences, you consider speculative principles only, and all your fears be for *Christianity*, it should he con-

sidered, that every man is a christian who believes the divine mission of Christ, and consequently the truth of his religion. And, for the reason given before, the only essential article of his religion is the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. Who Christ himself is, personally considered, is not, of itself, of any consequence, but only whether he be sufficiently authorized by the *God of truth* to teach what he did teach in his name. If such doctrines be taught concerning Christ, personally considered, as men of sense will not readily believe; if it be insisted on that he is Almighty God, the maker of the world, or any thing else that will seem to be either impossible, or highly improbable (by which many persons may be indisposed to receive christianity, and especially the great bodies of Jews and Mahometans, who keep strictly to that most important doctrine of the *unity of God*), every rational Christian ought on that account, as well as others, to exert himself to refute such notions, and to prevent the spread of them. But still we ought to bear in mind, that any man is entitled to the appellation of *a Christian* who believes that Christ (whether he was himself God, or man, or something between God and man,) had a commission from God, that he died and rose again; and who, in consequence of it, expects a general resurrection, and a life of retribution to come.

But should free inquiry lead to the destruction

of christianity itself, it ought not on that account to be discontinued: for we can only wish for the prevalence of christianity on the supposition of its being *true;* and if it fall before the influence of free inquiry, it can only do so in consequence of its not being true. But every man who is himself a serious believer in christianity must have the most perfect confidence in its truth. He can have no doubt of its being able to stand the test of the most rigorous examination, and consequently he can have no motive to be unwilling to submit it to that test. None can well be enemies to free inquiry but those who, not believing christianity, or at least strongly suspecting that it may not be true, yet wish to support it for some private and interested considerations; like those who lived by the trade of making shrines for the goddess Diana, who were interested in the support of her worship at all events, whether they themselves believed in her divinity or not, because by *that craft they got their wealth.* But this is an argument that cannot much affect any besides members of civil establishments of religion. You, my brethren, have no interest whatever in the support of christianity, if it be false; and your ministers very little. We, therefore, as dissenters, shall be absolutely inexcusable, if we be not friends to free inquiry in its utmost extent, and if we do not give the most unbounded scope to the use of our reason in matters of religion.

It is the great principle on which our cause rests, and without which it can never be worth supporting at all.

By all means, then, be so far consistent, as christians, as protestants, and as dissenters, as to give the greatest encouragement to free inquiry in matters of religion. Do you, who have leisure and capacity, study the subject of religion, the nature of its evidences, and every circumstance relating to it. No subjects of inquiry or speculation, within the reach of the human faculties, are so great and interesting as those which, in the most distant manner, relate to the revelation of the will of God to men, respecting our conduct here, and our expectations hereafter. The ultimate object of the whole scheme gives a dignity to comparatively little things belonging to it ; and no studies are in their nature capable of becoming more pleasing and satisfying to the mind than those of theology. For this I may venture to appeal to the experience of all those who, in consequence of having a taste for these studies as well as others, and of having made real proficiency in both, are the only competent judges in the case. Their being the chosen studies of Newton and Locke, for the greater and more valuable part of their lives, clearly shews that they considered them as superior to those of mathematics and natural philosophy in the one case, and of metaphysics and various other liberal pursuits, in

the other. Compared with this testimony, so emphatically given, by the actual employment of their time, how contemptible is the opinion of men whose studies have been confined to polite literature, natural science, or that of men of the world, who cannot pretend to any knowledge of the subject on which they pass their hasty censures! You who have fortune, but little leisure or capacity for such inquiries yourselves, at least encourage them in others. Give assistance to their labours, and you will have a better right to enjoy the fruits of them, though you may not be qualified, in any other respect, to contribute to their success.

Do you, in general, who are private members of christian societies, be, at least, so far the friends of free inquiry, as to throw no obstruction in the way of it. Allow your ministers the liberty that you take yourselves, and take no umbrage if, in consequence of giving more attention to matters of theology than you have leisure for, they should entertain opinions different from yours, provided that your agreement on the whole be such, as that their services are useful and edifying to you. After a laborious and hazardous course of inquiry, of the difficulties of which you can hardly be aware, it is no great hardship upon you to give them at least a dispassionate and attentive hearing. They cannot *force* any opinions upon you. You will still have the power of judging for yourselves; and without

hearing you cannot have even the means of forming a right judgment. And where an agreement cannot be had (and few persons who really think for themselves will agree in *all* things), you may exercise that mutual candour which is of more value than any agreement in speculation.

If your ministers be men of sense, and have any knowledge of human nature, they will not trouble you, from such a place as this, with speculations into which you cannot enter, or the discussion of questions that are not of some importance to our common christianity. But you may easily suppose, that, giving more attention to speculative religion than you have leisure to do, they may see the importance of certain articles in a stronger light than you will at first be aware of; and that will justify them to themselves, and ought to justify them to you, if they propose those articles with such evidence as strikes their minds in their favour, and with a zeal which they may think they deserve. It is indeed their duty, in the sight of God, to inculcate upon you whatever they shall think to be of importance to you, as members of christian societies, whether you receive it well or ill.

There are many things which they may think to be highly interesting *in speculation*, and proper for your consideration in your closets, which they would not think of proposing promiscuously from the pulpit, not being of sufficient importance, and the

minds of all not being sufficiently prepared for them. But there are some errors of a speculative nature, such as those respecting the unity of God, and the equity of his moral government, which have taken deep root among common christians, and which are perpetually inculcated from other pulpits, with respect to which it becomes us to oppose zeal to zeal, ; and every man who has *ears to hear* should be called upon to *hear and understand*, because every man who has ears to hear, and the most common understanding, may be made to see the absurdity and the mischievous consequences of such doctrines. The minds, therefore, of the commonest people ought to be enlightened, and their zeal excited, with respect to them. Let it appear that we, as well as others, despise what we think to be despicable, and abhor what we think to be shocking.

Let those, on the other hand, who are bold in speculation, bear with those who are not so, especially those who are in years, and who have not been much in the habit of diligent inquiry. God does not give the same disposition to every man ; nor indeed does the purpose of his providence admit of it. Long prejudices are also always, or at least generally, to be treated with tenderness. Besides, as it is happy for the cause of truth that some should be forward in speculation, it is no less happy that others should be backward to receive new opinions;

as, in consequence of this, every thing is more thoroughly canvassed, and it is only after a due course of discussion, in which every objection shall be brought forth, that there can be any probability that the reception of any truth will be lasting. A truth that has never been opposed cannot acquire that firm and unwavering assent, which is given to that which has stood the test of a rigorous examination.

As we call upon every man that has *ears to hear* that is, *ability to judge*, we must be prepared patiently to bear with the result of that judgment, whatever it be. If we invite examination and discussion we should take the consequences of it, without complaining. If the cause for which we contend be a good one, it will stand its ground; and if otherwise, we ourselves ought to rejoice in the fall of it.

To conclude, whether in searching after truth, or in judging of it, let us give one another all the aid and assistance that we can; remembering that we are all frail and fallible creatures, liable to mistakes, and to faults more dangerous than any mistakes. Let it, therefore, be our greatest care "to provoke unto love and to good works, to exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of us be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

With respect to *opinions*, the time is coming that will try every man's work what it is, whether we

are now building upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with suitable and durable materials, or such as will not bear the fire. And, with respect both to speculation and practice, let it be our great object so to acquit ourselves here below, in the absence of our Lord, that when he shall return and take an account of his servants, we may be found of him without spot and blameless, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

REFLECTIONS

ON THE PRESENT STATE OF FREE INQUIRY IN THIS COUNTRY.

I PUBLISH the preceding Discourse in part to oblige those before whom it was delivered; but chiefly because I do not think that the generality of even the more liberal-minded christians in this country have as yet given sufficient attention to the sentiments inculcated in it. This I perceive by the alarm that has been taken at some free but important discussions in the last volume of the *Theological Repository*. It was a willingness to convince such persons how groundless were the apprehensions they have expressed on this subject, that led me to the train of thought which runs through this discourse: though it will be perceived, that I had likewise a view to another class of persons, who despise all such discussions as those which I now allude to.

It has been too much the disposition of all christians to imagine that those who think a little more freely than themselves are ready to abandon christianity itself, together with their peculiar notions concerning it. They are so fully persuaded that their own opinions are contained in the scriptures, that they cannot separate the idea of renouncing he one from that of renouncing the other. But

a little observation and reflection on what has passed of a similar nature might satisfy them, that their apprehensions have no solid foundation; their own peculiar notions not having, in reality, that necessary connexion with christianity which they imagine them to have, from not considering how few the essentials of christianity are.

From want of distinguishing essentials from non-essentials, the Roman-Catholics have thought that there can be no christianity besides their own; and too many of the several sects of protestants think the same with respect to their several tenets. Many Arians (themselves held in abhorrence by Athanasians) have said that they could not consider Socinians as Christians; and some are now unreasonably apprehensive that those who disbelieve the miraculous conception, or the plenary inspiration of Christ and his apostles, in cases with respect to which the object of their mission did not require inspiration, are in danger of rejecting christianity; though they are as firm believers in the divine mission of Christ (which alone properly constitutes a christian) as themselves. This is the more extraordinary, as the doctrine of the plenary inspiration of the scriptures is, I believe, universally disclaimed by all who are called rational christians. But of what use is it to give up that doctrine, if we are never to avail ourselves of our opinions with respect to it, and do not thereby find ourselves at liberty to ex-

amine with perfect freedom narratives and reasonings which are confessedly not infallible, and in which therefore there may be mistakes? Besides, it is an allowed maxim with us, that the fewer blemishes of any kind we leave in our religion, the greater service we render it. But it is no uncommon thing to admit general *principles*, and yet startle at the natural and necessary *consequences* of them.

I am sensible that the present times are in more respects than one unfavourable to theological discussions. Very many, of whom better things might be expected, are averse to them; thinking them altogether useless, or perhaps dangerous. They are persuaded that their own opinions (which they have adopted without giving themselves much trouble about the matter) are perfectly rational, that the truth of them must be admitted, whenever they are fairly proposed to the mind, and that all we have to do is to apply them to their proper practical uses; and to the inculcating of these they would have all discourses from the pulpit, and from the press too, to be confined.

A great majority of every denomination of christians have always had this dislike of speculation; and therefore it is not at all extraordinary, that there should be so great a proportion of them, among those who think more rationally than their ancestors, and who therefore rank themselves in the class of *rational christians*. Their opinions are not

what they have investigated themselves, but what they have received from others, as much as the Roman Catholics have theirs. It may therefore be expected that they should be affected in the same manner towards them. Laborious inquirers after truth are but few in any community, nor is there any occasion that they should be numerous. It is only to be wished, that those who take no pains to inquire themselves would throw no obstacles in the way of him who does, and have the same indulgence for his feelings, that he has for theirs.

In another respect, also, the times in which we live are unfauvorable to free inquiry in matters of religion. We are not, indeed, *persecuted* for our religious principles, and few persons have even much scruple of openly declaring what they think; but the influence of habit, of fashion, and of connexions, in these peaceable times, is such, that few persons, very few indeed, have the courage to *act* agreeably to their principles, so as to rank themselves, and to appear, in that class of men to which they really belong. They content themselves, as the heathen philosophers did, with *thinking with the wise, and acting with the vulgar*; a conduct certainly unworthy of a christian, who ought to sacrifice every thing to *truth*, and *consistency of character*. This good, however, arises from the evil, that such persons allow themselves more liberty in speculation than they probably would do,

if they thought themselves bound in conscience to do what I should call acting agreeably to their principles; and by this means the foundation is gradually laying for a future change in the more public aspect of things.

The converts that are daily made to the Unitarian doctrine, and who for the present continue members of Trinitarian churches, may in time be sensible of the obligation they are under to withdraw themselves from that mode of worship; or, if not, they will always be ready to join their influence to forward any attempts that may be made towards a further reformation. And when the generality of those who really read and think shall become Unitarians (and those who do not read or think for themselves are sure to follow their leaders, and of course join every majority), a small change in the political state of things in a country, such as no man can foresee before it actually takes place, and which may be at no great distance, may suffice to overturn the best compacted establishments *at once*, before the bigoted friends of them suspect any danger. And thus the system which has stood for ages, without any visible marks of ruin or decay, may vanish, like an enchanted castle in romance. For then men, whose minds were already emancipated, will in a moment find themselves at liberty in all respects, without any motive whatever to engage them to give their sup-

port to error and superstition. Circumstances may even arise in which the most indifferent may feel themselves inspired with courage, and become warm advocates for those principles which they now hold in perfect silence, hardly speaking of them to their nearest friends. How many are there already *speaking out*, who some time ago were almost afraid to *think !*

Let us not, therefore, be discouraged, though, for the present, we should see no great number of churches professedly Unitarian. It is sufficiently evident that Unitarian principles are gaining ground every day. Every attempt to suppress them by writing, or otherwise, has hitherto been favourable to their spread, and we may be confident it ever will be so. We are now sowing the seeds which the cold of winter may prevent from sprouting, but which a genial spring will make to shoot and grow up; so that the field which to-day appears perfectly naked, and barren, may to-morrow be all green, and promise an abundant harvest. The present silent propagation of truth may even be compared to those causes in nature, which lie dormant for a time, but which in proper circumstances, act with the greatest violence. We are, as it were, laying gunpowder, grain by grain, under the old building of error and superstition, which a single spark may hereafter inflame, so as to produce an instantaneous explosion; in conse-

quence of which that edifice, the erection of which has been the work of ages, may be overturned in a moment, and so effectually as that the same foundation can never be built upon again.

If we be succesful in the propagation of truth, we need not give ourselves any concern about the measures of government respecting it. This is equally out of our province, and unnecessary. Causes will always produce their effects; and though the cases be of a different nature, it is as certain an inference as any in geometry, that an Unitarian people cannot long be subject to a Trinitarian establishment. Indeed no motive can be imagined why any civil governors (supposing it to be in their power) should not allow the people the open profession of the religion they really choose, and are willing to support. Things are already in such a train, that, though no person can foresee the particular time and manner of the change in favour of Unitarianism, we may be as certain of its taking place, as if we saw it actually accomplished. And till things are properly ripe for such a revolution, it would be absurd to expect it, and in vain to attempt it.

When a competent number of the more intelligent persons in all parts of the Roman empire were either declared Christians, or so well disposed towards a change, as not to be sorry for it, the conversion of an emperor was sufficient to establish

christianity, without any alarming opposition. The conversion of Tiberius, of Vespasian, of Marcus Antonius, or any other emperor in an earlier period, would not have done it. But when an *internal revolution* had been previously made in favor of christianity, though Constantine should not have been converted, the *external revolution* could not have been delayed much longer. It would certainly have taken place, whether any particular emperor had favoured it or not.

In like manner, when the minds of a proper number of persons were enlightened with respect to the grosser errors of popery, the boldness of Luther and a few others, roused by the impudence of the venders of indulgences, was sufficient to produce what has been called *the reformation*. Ten Luthers, in an earlier period, would only have supplied so many victims for the Inquisition; and though no Luther should have appeared at the beginning of the sixteenth century, things were then in such a state, that, by some other means, a similar revolution in favour of religious liberty would, no doubt, have taken place.

It has been well observed by philosophical historians, that if the loss of a single battle decide the fate of an empire, there must have been a previous reason, in the general state of things, why so much should depend on the event of a single battle;

and that, in a different state of things, the loss of many battles would not have overturned the state.

It is our business, therefore, by conversation, by preaching, and by writing, to get access to the minds of those who are disposed to think; and without giving ourselves any trouble about the conduct of government, to employ ourselves simply in the propagation of truth. Here is a great and glorious field fully open to our utmost exertions, and requiring them. And while we are successful in these labours (and the success is visible every day), though we should not live to see any favourable change in the face of public affairs, we may die in as firm a faith of its taking place, as Joseph did of his countrymen inhabiting the promised land, when he ordered that he should not be buried, but that his body should only be embalmed, and put into a coffin in Egypt, ready to be carried away when they should leave that country.

The most equitable thing in the governors of any country would, no doubt, be to allow Unitarians, or any other description of men, the use of a church, or any other public building in a town, in which they should be so numerous as to occupy one, and when their proportion of the tythes &c. would be sufficient for the maintenance of a minister of their persuasion; and no sort of inconvenience would arise to the state from such a measure as this. This was done in several places in Ger-

many at the time of the Reformation. But in the present state of things it is vain to expect any such equitable conduct. We may, however, besides *deserving* it, be doing that which shall ensure such an event at a future time; when it shall be sufficiently understood that Unitarians are quite as good subjects as Trinitarians, and therefore that there has been no good reason why the latter should so long have enjoyed their present exclusive advantages. How the belief of a mysterious doctrine operates to the prosperity and security of the state, is a problem not very easy to solve.

At Boston, in New-England, (a country in which no man was taxed towards the support of any religion that he did not approve, and which never flourished the less on that account) there were three episcopal churches; and had the English government continued there, the English Liturgy, in its present state, would, no doubt, have continued to be used in them all: but the principal of them has now adopted an Unitarian form of worship, and the same will probably be done in other provinces of the United States. Was there equal liberty in this country (which may take place, by means as unforeseen by us as the revolution in America) there are few considerable towns in which the people (voting freely, and all the complex influence of the present establishment out of the question) would not have at least one Unitarian church.

And if one would be wanted now, there will, I am confident, be a demand for two twenty years hence. This may be said with tolerable certainty, from the consideration of the increase of Unitarians in the last fifty years, the greater still in proportion in the last twenty, and the greatest of all in the last ten years. What then may we not reasonably expect from the train in which things now are?

The efforts of men to stop what they may call the mischief would be like the attempt to stop a rivulet supplied by a constant spring however small. Nothing could be easier than to make a dam that would be sufficient for the purpose at first. But as the water keeps rising, the dam must be made higher and stronger, and (the effort of the water to burst its way continually increasing) the highest and strongest must necessarily fail some time or other, and the deluge, which would be the consequense, would be in proportion to the time in which it had been confined. Truth has never yet been conquered by power, numerous as have been the attempts of the latter to bear it down.

It may be said that since there has been an increase of unbelievers, as well as Unitarians, in the last century, it may, on these principles, be predicted that *they* will continue to increase, to the extirpation of christians of all denominations. This reasoning, I own, would have been just, if men had become unbelievers, as well as Unitarians, from

reading and thinking. But there is in this respect a most essential difference in the two cases. Of the unbelievers of this age (I speak from the fullest persuasion) few indeed are so from that serious inquiry and real conviction, to which alone the spread of Unitarianism can be ascribed. The rejection of christianity may be accounted for from many causes besides a serious conviction of its fallacy; but no other cause can reasonably be assigned why a Trinitarian should become an Unitarian; as the obligations of moral virtue are not relaxed by the change, and the allurements of honour and profit are on the side of the established faith.

It is evident to those who converse with unbelievers, that few of them are qualified to discuss the evidences of christianity; a proof that they have not rejected it from any deficiency that they found in its evidences; whereas there are great numbers of Unitarians who can readily give the reasons of their faith, which shews that they have really considered and weighed the subject.

It is also to be observed, that a great increase of unbelievers has been owing to the corruptions of christianity; and this cause ceasing, in part by the efforts of Unitarians, the effects will in due time cease of course. Christianity and its evidences are exhibited in such a light at present, that fewer philosophical persons, giving due attention to the subject (which is the great thing that is wanting, but

which many circumstances may excite), will be able to withhold their assent to it.

Others will object to the conclusiveness of this reasoning to prove the future universality of Unitarianism, the rapid spread and long continuance of Mahometanism in the world. But the grounds and principles of that religion underwent no severe discussion at the time of its promulgation. The professors of it wrote little in its defence; and there never was an age in which the Mahometan and Christian literati had so free and equal an intercourse, as to give room for much controversy. Whenever that shall take place, and the common people be in a capacity of reading, and judging for themselves, less than a century, I am persuaded, will be sufficient fully to establish the credit of the one system, and to destroy that of the other. Which of the two must yield in the contest, I, who am a christian, cannot have a doubt.

On the contrary, christianity, from the earliest period, was eagerly attacked and defended, the common people gave great attention to the controversy, and it was the manifest superiority of the christian apologists in point of argument that decided between them.

The same observations will apply to the reformation from popery; and had not the civil powers intervened, there can be no doubt, but that an end would soon have been put to the authority of the

church of Rome, and the chief corruptions of it. Had the reading of protestant books only been allowed in popish countries, the reformation would have kept advancing, notwithstanding all the opposition from the civil powers.

The controversy between the Unitarians and Trinitarians has been open many years, much has been written on both sides, the common people are become parties, and civil government does not directly interfere. In these circumstances, it is a fact which no person can deny, that a great number of the common people, with a much greater proportion of men of learning are become Unitarians; and this has been the case so long, that there can be no doubt of its continuance.

The effect of free discussion is to produce a number of persons capable of writing in defence of their principles. Unbelievers really qualified to write upon the subject are very few, compared with learned christians. It is no less evident that learned Unitarians increase, while learned Trinitarians decrease These facts are sufficient to enable any person, without making himself master of the respective arguments, to conclude that Unitarian christians will continue to increase, to the extermination of unbelievers on the one hand, and Trinitarians on the other. The interference of the civil powers, and the influence of splendid establishments, may retard this event, but will not be able to prevent it

Some may smile at this method of calculating and predicting events. But moral causes are as uniform and certain in their operation as natural ones, and when the *data* are equally clear, the *principles* will authorize equally sure conclusions.

If a man of common sense only, without any knowledge of philosophy, were told that the Newtonian system of the universe, after having been canvassed by philosophers of all nations, had, notwithstanding great opposition, been gradually gaining ground for the space of more than half a century, he would not doubt the universality of its reception in time. Having similar *data*, I think we may venture to predict the universal prevalence of Unitarianism in a future period.

If the controversy between the Arians and the Socinians should be kept up ten or twenty years longer, and in all that time the Socinians should continue to increase, as they have done during the last ten years, few persons will be backward to prognosticate that Arianism also will finally and even soon be exterminated, especially as it has not the support of the civil powers.

The *principles* on which I argue will hardly be contested; but persons, according as they are disposed with respect to particular controversies, will see the *facts* relating to them in different lights. What I say of the uniform spread of Unitarian principles may possibly be denied by some Trinitarians, but it is allowed by Unitarians. To them, there-

fore, it holds out a sure prospect of a final triumph over all their adversaries, and it is for their encouragement that I make these observations.

To write in this manner may be said to be imprudent, as it is giving an alarm to those who now apprehend no danger, and therefore make no efforts to prevent it. But the friends of free inquiry and truth may rest satisfied, that, as every effort which has hitherto been made to bear down the cause for which they contend, has, in reality, served to promote it, so also will every future effort that can be made for the same purpose. The cause of truth may be compared to an engine constructed so as to be put in motion by the tide, and which is kept in its proper movement, whether the water flow in or flow out. Nothing here is wanting but *motion*, it being impossible for that motion, from whatever quarter it arise, to operate unfavourably.

The best worldly policy, in the enemies of truth, is, no doubt, that of those who endeavour to stifle all inquiry, who read nothing, and who reply to nothing. But even this will do but little, while the friends of truth are zealous and active in its interests; as by this means they have the advantage, in the eye of the world, of being known to invite and provoke discussion; being seen to walk over the field of controversy without an adversary; though it would certainly be more desirable still to have a respectable opponent.

As to this country, we may be confident that,

while error and superstition are falling every where abroad, they can never really gain ground here. We have in a great measure set the example of free inquiry, and have taken the lead in religious liberty to other nations; and though the policy of the times may be averse to any extention of this liberty, circumstances will, no doubt, arise, that will hereafter be as favourable to it in this country as they are now in others. Having hitherto been foremost in this great cause, it will not be in the power of man to keep us long behind the rest of Europe. Abroad they are *the governing powers*, that promote reformation; but with us, *the people* think and act for themselves, a circumstance infinitely more promising for an effectual and permanent reformation; there being nothing of *worldly policy* in the case, but a pure *love of truth* that is the great spring of action with us.

Notwithstanding, therefore, the indolence and indifference of friends, and the silence or virulent opposition of enemies, let the advocates of free inquiry steadily pursue their purpose. Let us examine every thing, with the greatest freedom, without any regard to consequences, which, though we cannot distinctly see them, we may assure ourselves will be such as we shall have abundant cause to rejoice in.

Some persons dislike controversy, as leading to a *diversity of opinions*. But as this is a necessary, so it is only a temporary inconvenience. It is the only

way to arrive at a permanent and useful uniformity, which it is sure to bring about at last. Religious truth cannot be so different a thing from truth of every other kind, but that it must at length overcome all opposition ; and the knowledge of its having stood the test of the severest examination, by men sufficiently able and interested to oppose it, will at last produce a firm conviction that all future opposition will be equally vain, and thus terminate in the most unwavering acquiescence.

It will be said that this process is a very slow one. But it is as sure in its operation, as it is necessary in the nature of things. Every great truth, in the firm belief of which mankind now universally acquiesce, has gone through the same process ; and it has generally been longer in proportion to its importance, though somewhat shorter in proportion to the activity with which the controversies it has occasioned have been conducted. By promoting discussion, therefore, we really accelerate this progress, and are bringing forward the period of *uniformity* ; while those who are the enemies of free inquiry, and who hate all controversy, are prolonging that state of suspense and diversity of opinion, which they so much dislike, and pushing back that very uniformity of opinion for which they sigh. For this *period of controversy* must have its course, and come to its proper termination, before any valuable and lasting uniformity can take place. The con-

duct of those who wish to see an end of controversy at present may be compared to that of those who should endeavour to keep a ship steady in its place at sea; when our aim should be, by using all our sails and oars, to get into harbour, where alone it can be kept steady.

The great articles which are now in a course of disscussion will not be determined in our time. But if we exert ourselves, this work may be accomplished in the time of our children, or grand-children; and surely if we have any elevation or comprehension of mind, we may look forward to, and actually enjoy the happiness we procure for *them*. We scruple not to plant trees for the benefit of posterity. Let us likewise sow the seeds of truth for them, and anticipate the acknowledgments they will make us on that account.

I do not write this from a persuasion that every thing that I have myself contended for is indisputably true. On the contrary, I have, for the sake of discussion, hazarded many things, and shall probably hazard many more; and I have actually changed many opinions, theological as well as philosophical, which I have advanced since I was a writer. But if men make use of their faculties at all, and especially in that period which is most favourable to inquiry (which is about the middle time of life), they may arrive at so much certainty, as will justify them in expressing a considerable degree of confi-

dence, at least with respect to those subjects to which they have given the closest attention.

I do profess to have this confidence in my opinion concerning the doctrine of the trinity. I do not think the doctrine of transubstantiation more manifestly absurd, and this is by much the less mischievous of the two. Not that I think there are no wise and good men who are advocates for the doctrine of the trinity. I acknowledge there are. But there are likewise many persons, of whose ability and integrity also I think very highly, who are advocates for the doctrine of transubstantiation; and as there were learned pagans five centuries after the promulgation of christianity, there may be some respectable believers in the doctrines of the trinity and of transubstantiation, some ages hence.

The minds of a few *individuals* may be so locked up as that no keys we can apply will be able to open them. But it is with *the bulk of mankind* that we have to do, because they will always be within the reach of reason: and solitary unbelievers, or solitary bigots, may have their use in the general system; an use similar to that of the few idolatrous inhabitants of the land of Canaan, who were not extirpated; which was that of trying and exercising the Israelites, without having it in their power to drive them out again.

THE

PREFACE

TO

TWO DISCOURSES,

I. ON HABITUAL DEVOTION,
II. ON THE DUTY OF NOT LIVING TO OURSELVES.

THE former of these discourses I have been induced to publish by the request of the body of dissenting ministers who assemble annually at Dudley, in Staffordshire, before whom the greater part of it was delivered on Tuesday the 21st of May last. The latter was preached before the assembly of ministers of the counties of Lancaster and Chester, met at Manchester, May 16th, 1764, to carry into execution a scheme for the relief of their widows and children. But though it was printed at their request, it was not generally published; as only a small edition was printed, and sold in that neighbourhood. Several of my friends having expressed their wishes to see it made more public, I have thought proper to print them together, especially as the subjects of them have a considerable relation to each other; the one recommending a proper disposition of mind with respect to God, and the other that which respects men. In both of them, also, I have availed myself of Dr. Hartley's theory of the human affections, the excellence of which is

that it not only explains, with wonderful simplicity, many phenomena of the mind, which are altogether inexplicable on other principles, but also leads to a variety of practical applications, and those of the most valuable kind. Of this I have given several specimens in my Observations on Education, and others of my publications.

My apology for introducing any thing of this nature into these discourses is, that neither of them was composed for a common audience. Besides, the most abstruse parts of them are of such a nature, as to be pretty easily intelligible to persons of reflection, though they should have no knowledge of that particular theory. For the general doctrine of the association of ideas is known to all persons of a liberal education. Whenever I have delivered these discourses before a common audience, I have omitted whatever I thought would not be readily understood by them, and such passages (which however are not very many) may now be passed over, without much difficulty or inconvenience, by those persons for whose use they are not calculated.

To the former of these discourses the public are already under considerable obligations, though they have been ignorant of it; as it was the occasion of that excellent poem of Mrs. Barbauld, intitled "An Address to the Deity," which was composed immediately after the first delivery of it, before an assembly of ministers at Wakefield, in Yorkshire, in the year 1767. Were I to inform my readers how soon that poem appeared after the delivery of the discourse, it would add much to their idea of the powers of the writer. I could also make the same observation with respect to several other pieces, and some of them the most admired in that collection.

If my theological publications have been more of a speculative than a practical nature, it is merely because circum-

stances have led me to it, and by no means because the former are more pleasing to me. I hope I shall always consider speculation as subservient to practice. The most exact knowledge of truth, and the greatest zeal for it, will avail nothing without the practice of those virtues which the most uninstructed of mankind perfectly understand. Nay, the more knowledge we have of the christian religion, of the general plan and object of it, the more inexcusable shall we be, if we do not, in the first place, take care to impress our hearts with that love of God, and that unreserved devotedness to his will, which our Saviour calls "the first and greatest of all the commandments," and also with that disinterested good-will to our fellow creatures, which he calls the "second great commandment, and like unto it."

He was himself equally exemplary with respect to them both: and it is vain for us to pretend to be christians, if we do not study to resemble him (whom alone we are to acknowledge in the character of Lord and master) in the disposition of our minds, and in the conduct of our lives. May we all be so attentive to discharge our proper duty, and to improve the talents with which we are severally intrusted, that when, according to his promise, "he shall return, and take an account of his servants, we may be found without spot and blameless."

The world in which we live, with all the influences to which we are subject, may be equally our friend or our enemy, according to the use we make of it. It is wonderfully adapted, by the exercise it gives to our faculties, and to our passions and affections, to establish, strengthen, and settle us in the habit and practice of all virtue, and to raise us to a pitch of excellence to which Adam in paradise could never have attained. But then it is equally possible that,

by sloth and indulgence we may debase our natures to a degree equally wonderful. The knowledge and belief of christianity itself, as well as every other advantage of which we are possessed, is also capable either of promoting the moral perfection of our natures, and our fitness for immortal happiness, or of making us the proper objects of a greater condemnation than that of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment.

It behoves us then to consider our situation and all our privileges very attentively, that we may make the best use of them. It is not in our option to be in any other circumstances than those in which our Maker has placed us. It will also avail us nothing to "hide any talent in a napkin." As we have received it, we must give an account of the use we make of it.

We are likewise ignorant of the time when this account will be called for; and, great and serious as the business of life is, the time allowed for the dispatch of it is both short and uncertain. But, though short, it is sufficient for the purpose of it, if it be rightly improved; and then the uncertainty of its duration is a circumstance that does not need to give us any concern. "At such an hour as we think not the Judge may come," but then, "happy is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching."

I shall take the liberty to close this preface with an extract of what is more peculiarly practical, and therefore more immediately suiting my present purpose, from Mrs. Barbauld's poem above mentioned.

"If the soft hand of winning pleasure leads
By living waters and through flowery meads,
When all is smiling, tranquil, and serene,
And vernal beauty paints the flattering scene;

Oh teach me to elude each latent snare,
And whisper to my sliding heart, BEWARE:
With caution let me hear the syren's voice,
And, doubtful, with a trembling heart rejoice.

If, friendless, in a vale of tears I stray,
Where briers wound, and thorns perplex my way,
Still let my steady soul thy goodness see,
And with strong confidence lay hold on thee;
With equal joy my various lot receive,
Resign'd to die, or resolute to live;
Prepar'd to kiss the sceptre, or the rod,
While God is seen in all, and all in God.

With thee in shady solitudes I walk,
With thee in busy crowded cities talk;
In every creature own thy forming pow'r,
In each event thy providence adore.
Thy hopes shall animate my drooping soul,
Thy precepts guide me, and thy fear controul.
Thus shall I rest, unmov'd by all alarms,
Secure within the temple of thy arms;
From anxious cares, from gloomy terrors free,
And feel myself omnipotent in thee.

Then, when the last, the closing hour draws nigh,
And earth recedes before my swimming eye,
Teach me to quit this transitory scene,
With decent triumph and a look serene;
Teach me to fix my ardent hopes on high,
And, having liv'd to thee, in thee to die."

SERMON V.

ON HABITUAL DEVOTION.

PSALM x. 4.

The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God. God is not in all his thoughts.

GOD, my Christian brethren, is a being with whom we all of us have to do, and the relation we stand in to him is the most important of all our relations. Our connections with other beings and other things, are slight and transient, in comparison with this. God is our *maker*, our constant *preserver* and *benefactor*, our moral *governor*, and our final *judge*. He is present with us wherever we are; the secrets of all hearts are constantly known to him, and *he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*. Here, then, is a situation in which we find ourselves, that demands our closest attention. The consideration is, in the highest degree, interesting and alarming: knowing how absolutely dependent we are upon God, that *in him we live and move, and have our being*; and knowing also, that by vice and folly we have rendered ourselves justly obnoxious to his displeasure.

Now, to think and to act, in a manner corresponding to this our necessary intercourse with God, certainly requires that we keep up an habitual regard to it: and a total, or very great degree of inattention to it, must be highly criminal and dangerous. Accordingly, we find in the Scriptures, that it is characteristic of a good man, that "he sets the Lord always before him," and that "he acknowledges God in all his ways. Whereas, it is said of the wicked in my text, that "God is not in all their thoughts;" and elsewhere, that "the fear of God is not before their eyes; that "they put the thoughts of God far from them, and will not the knowledge of the Most High."

This circumstance seems to furnish a pretty good test of the state of a man's mind with respect to virtue and vice. The most abandoned and profligate of mankind are those who live "without God in the world, entirely thoughtless of his being, perfections and providence; having their hearts wholly engrossed with this world and the things of it; by which means those passions, which terminate in the enjoyment of them, are inflamed to such a degree, that no other principle can restrain their indulgence. These persons may be called *practical atheists;* and the temper of mind they have acquired often leads them to deny both natural and revealed religion. They secretly wish, indeed they cannot but wish, there may be no truth in those

principles, the apprehension of which is apt to give them disturbance; and hence they give little attention to the evidence that is produced for them, and magnify all the objections they hear made to them. And it is well known, that, in a mind so strongly biassed, the most cogent reasons often amount to nothing, while the most trifling cavils pass for demonstration. It is the same with respect to any other speculation, when the mind has got a *bias* in favour of any particular conclusion.

On the other hand, a truly and perfectly good man loves, and therefore cherishes, the thought of God, his father and his friend; till every production of divine power and skill, every instance of divine bounty, and every event of divine providence never fails to suggest to his mind the idea of the great Author of all things, "the giver of every good and every perfect gift," and the sovereign disposer of all affairs and of all events. Thus he lives, as it were, constantly *seeing him who is invisible*. He sees God in every thing, and he sees every thing in God. He *dwells in love*, and thereby *dwells in God, and God in him*. And so long as he considers himself as living in the world which God has made, and partaking of the bounty with which his providence supplies him; so long as he is intent upon discharging his duty, in the situation in which he believes the Divine Being has placed him, and meets with no greater trials and difficul-

ties than he is persuaded his God and Father has appointed for his good, it is almost impossible that the thought of God should ever be long absent from his mind. Every thing he sees or feels will make it recur again and again perpetually. His whole life will be, as it were, one act of devotion; and this state of mind, being highly pleasurable, and his satisfaction having infinite sources, will be daily increasing, so as to grow more equable and more intense, to all eternity; when it will be "joy unspeakable, and full of glory."

These are the two extremes of the sentiments and conduct of men with respect to God, and all the varieties of the human characters will be found somewhere between them; so that we may be deemed virtuous or vicious, in proportion as we approach to the one or the other.

The more imperfect of the middle classes of mankind will have their minds too much engrossed by this world and the things of it, so as to exclude, in a very great degree, the apprehension of God, and of their relation to him. Provided, however, that they have had a religious education, these thoughts cannot be prevented from recurring from time to time, and producing stronger or weaker resolutions of repentance and amendment; but not having their full influence, and therefore serving rather to disquiet the mind, conscious of a want of perfect integrity, they will be apt to be overborne by the

superior power of things seen and temporal; and the minds of such persons being in this fluctuating condition, whatever success they may have in the world, their lives will contain a great mixture of anxiety and remorse.

But those whom we may style the more perfect of the middle classes of men, though, like the former, their minds may be now and then carried away by the magic influences of this world; and though they may give too far, and too eagerly, into the pursuit of its pleasures, riches and honours, they never will wholly, or for a long time, lose sight of God and of their duty; and pious sentiments, recurring with superior force at intervals, will produce a kind of *religious fervour*, which, rousing the mind to a greater exertion of its powers, will produce good resolutions with considerable strength and vigour, and thereby break their growing attachment to the world. These fervours, however, will of course remit, and other objects will necessarily resume some part, at least, of their influence; but if a sense of God and of religion have once taken firm hold of the mind, in the early part of life, there will be reason to hope that an express regard to them will return with greater force, and after shorter intervals, perpetually. By these means such strength will be given to the principle of conscience, that in the furthest excursions they make from the strict path of religion, even while

they maintain no express regard to God in their actions, the bare apprehension of a thing being *right*, and their *duty*, will, in all considerable instances, immediately and mechanically determine their minds; so that they will never deliberately do any thing which they are convinced is unlawful and offensive to God. At most, if ever a stronger temptation than usual should induce them to transgress their known duty, in any of the greater instances of it, the state of their minds will be such, as that these transgressions will be followed by the keenest compunction and contrition, which will make them less liable to commit the same offence a second time.

Thus we see that those persons, in whose minds there is this prevailing disposition to virtue, will be improved both by the uniform practice of their duty, which necessarily strengthens the *habit* of it, and even by occasional transgressions, which gives a stronger *stimulus* to the power of conscience. But there is great danger, lest these violations of known duty be either so great as to produce despair, which naturally hardens the mind, or so frequent as to beget a habit. Both these weaken the power of conscience. The man then goes backward in religion, and may at last, even from this more advanced state of virtue, be brought to "commit all iniquity with greediness." Let *him*, then, "who thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall;" and let all of us, conscious of the frailty of our natures, be

intent upon "working out our salvation with fear and trembling."

An *habitual regard to God* being the most effectual means of advancing us from the more imperfect to the more perfect state I have been describing, I shall endeavour to recommend this leading duty to you, by a fuller and more distinct enumeration of its happy effects; and I shall then shew what I apprehend to be the most effectual methods of promoting it, and of removing the various obstructions to it.

1. An habitual regard to God in our actions tends greatly to keep us firm in our adherence to our duty. It has pleased divine Providence to place man in a state of trial and probation. This world is strictly such. We are surrounded with a great variety of objects, adapted to gratify a variety of senses with which we are furnished. The pleasures they give us are all innocent in moderation, and they engage us in a variety of agreeable and proper pursuits. But our natures are such, as that the frequent indulgence of any of our appetites tends to make its demands inordinate, and to beget an habitual propensity to indulge it; and this proneness to the excessive indulgence of any of our pastions enslaves our minds, and is highly dangerous and criminal. By this means we too often come to forget God our maker, to injure our fellow-creatures of mankind, and to do a still greater, and

more irreparable injury to ourselves, both in mind and body.

It has pleased Almighty God, therefore, from the concern he had for our good, to forbid these immoderate indulgences of the love of pleasure, riches, and honour, by express *laws*, guarded with the most awful sanctions. Now we are certainly less liable to forget these laws, and our obligation to observe them, when we keep up an habitual regard to our great Lawgiver and Judge; when we consider him as always present with us; when we consider that "his eyes are in every place, beholding both the evil and the good;" that he "sees in secret, and will one day reward openly." In this manner we shall acquire an habitual reverence for God and his laws, which will end in an habitual obedience to them, even without any express regard to their authority. Thus we should certainly be less likely to neglect the request of a friend, or the injunction of a master, if we could always keep in mind the remembrance of our friend or master; and a constant attention to them would certainly give us a habit of pleasing them in all things.

2. An habitual regard to God promotes an uniform cheerfulness of mind; it tends to dissipate anxiety, or melancholy, and may even, in some cases, prevent madness. Without a regard to God, as the maker and governor of all things, this world, affords but a gloomy and uncomfortable prospect.

Without this, we see no great *end* for which we have to live, we have no great or animating *object* to pursue; and whatever schemes we may be carrying on, our views are bounded by a very short and narrow space. To an Atheist, therefore, every thing must appear little, dark, and confused. And let it be considered, that, in proportion as we forget God, and lose our regard to him, we adopt the sentiments and views of Atheists, and shut our eyes to the bright and glorious prospects which religion exhibits to us.

Religion, my brethren, the doctrine of a God, of a providence, and of a future state, opens an immense, a glorious, and most transporting prospect; and every man, who is humbly conscious that he conforms to the will of his Maker, may enjoy, and rejoice in, this prospect. Considering ourselves as the subjects of the moral government of God, we see a most important sphere of action in which we have to exert ourselves, we have the greatest of all objects set before us, *glory, honour and immortality;* "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, as the reward of our faithful perseverance in well-doing;" and we have a boundless existence, an eternity, in which to pursue and enjoy this reward.

These great views and objects, the contemplation of which must be habitual to the mind which keeps up an habitual regard to God, cannot fail to di-

minish the lustre of the things of time and sense, which engage our attention here below; and while they lessen our solicitude and anxiety about them, they must cure that fretfulness and distress of mind, which is occasioned by the disappointments we meet with in them.

For the same reason, this habitual regard to God, this life of devotion, which I would recommend, must tend in some measure to prevent that most deplorable of all the calamities mankind are subject to, I mean *madness*. It is well known, that the circumstance which generally first occasions, or at least greatly contributes to, this disorder, is too close and too anxious an attention to some *single thing* in which a person is greatly interested; so that, for a long time, he can hardly think of any thing else, and particularly is often prevented from *sleeping*, by means of it. Thus we frequently see, that when persons are of a sanguine temper of mind, a severe disappointment of any kind will end in madness. Also a sudden transport of *joy*, from unexpected success, will sometimes have the same effect. But, from the nature of the thing, this violence of either kind could hardly take place in a truly devout and pious mind, in the mind of a man who considers all the events, in which he can be concerned, as appointed by a God infinitely wise and good; who, he is persuaded, hath, in the most afflictive providences, the most gracious intention

to him, and to all mankind; and who, by the most prosperous events, means to try his virtue, and to put him upon the most difficult of all exercises, that of behaving properly in such circumstances. To a mind rightly disposed, and duly seasoned with a sense of religion, nothing here below will appear to be of sufficient moment to produce these dreadful effects. "We shall rejoice, as though we rejoiced not; and weep, as though we wept not; knowing that the fashion of this world passeth away."

Deep melancholy is often occasioned, in persons of a lower tone of spirits, by the same kind of disappointments which produce raging madness in others. It is the effect of *despair*, and could never take place, but when a person apprehended that that which we may call his *all*, that in which he put his chief trust and confidence, had failed him, and he had no other resource to fly to. But a truly religious man can never despair; because, let what will befall him here below, he knows his chief happiness is safe, being lodged where "neither moth nor rust can corrupt, and where thieves cannot break through nor steal. In patience, therefore, he will be able at all times to possess his own soul, exercising a steady trust and confidence in God, the rock of ages, the sure resting-place of all generations."

Melancholy, or despondence in a lower degree, what we commonly call *lowness of spirits*, generally arises from a want of some object of pursuit sufficient to engage the attention, and rouse a man to

the proper exertion of his powers. In this situation, he has nothing to do but to think of himself and his own feelings, which never fails to involve him in endless anxiety and distress. But a principle of religion will ever put a man upon a variety of active and vigorous pursuits. No truly pious and good man can be an idle man. He will fully employ all his power of doing good; he will not keep his "talent hid in a napkin;" and far from complaining that time hangs heavy on their hands, he will rather complain, that he has not time enough for the execution of half his benevolent purposes.

3. An habitual regard to God fits a man for the business of this life, giving a peculiar presence and intrepidity of mind; and it is, therefore, the best support in difficult enterprises of any kind. A man who keeps up an habitual regard to God, who "acknowledges him in all his ways," and lives a life of devotion to him, has a kind of "union with God;" feeling in some measure the same sentiments, and having the same views. Hence, being, in the language of the apostle, "a worker together with God," and therefore being confident that God is with him, and for him, "he will not fear what man can do unto him." Moreover, fearing God, and having confidence in him, he is a stranger to every other fear. Being satisfied that God will work all his pleasure in him, by him, and for him, he is free from alarm, and perturbation, and is not easily disconcerted, so as to lose the possession of his own mind. And

having this presence of mind, being conscious of the integrity of his own heart, confiding in the favour of his Maker, and therefore sensible that there is nothing of much real value that he can lose, he will have leisure to consider every situation in which he finds himself, and be able to act with calmness and prudence, as circumstances may require.

Is there, then, any active and difficult service to which we are summoned by the voice of our country, of mankind, and of God, these are the men, I mean men of religion and devotion, in whom we can most confide. Other men may be roused by their passions to any pitch of patriotic enthusiasm. They may oppose the insidious attempts of corrupt ministers or tyrants to enslave their country, or may bravely face a foreign enemy in the field, though they risk their fortunes, and their lives in the contest. But mere worldly-minded men, staking their *all* in such enterprises as these, and having little more than a sense of *honour* to support them, may in some critical moment be sensible of the value of what they risk, and on that principle prove cowards.

Whereas the man of religion feels the same indignation against all iniquitous attempts to enslave himself and his country, and if he have the same native ardour of mind, he will be roused to act with the same vigour against a tyrant, or an invader; but, running no risk of what is of most consequence to him, he will not be so liable to be intimidated:

he will be more master of himself, have greater presence of mind, and act with greater prudence in time of danger. If he die in the glorious struggle, he dies, not with the gloomy ferocity of the mere man of this world, but with the triumph of a christian, in a consciousness of having finished his career of virtue in the most glorious manner in which he could possibly finish it, in the service of his country, and of mankind.

Having thus considered the important *effects* of an habitual regard to God in all our ways, I come to treat of the most proper and effectual methods of promoting this temper of mind.

1. If you be really desirous to cultivate this habitual devotion, endeavour, in the first place, to divest your minds of too great a multiplicity of the cares of this world. The man who lives to God, in the manner in which I have been endeavouring to describe, lives to him principally, and loves and confides in him above all. To be solicitous about this world, therefore, as if our chief happiness consisted in it, must be incompatible with this devotion. *We cannot serve God and Mammon.* If we be *christians*, we should consider that the great and professed object of our religion is the revelation of a future life, of unspeakably more importance to us than this transitory world, and the perishable things of it. As christians, we should consider ourselves as *citizens of heaven*, and only

strangers and pilgrims here below. We must therefore see, that, as christians, there is certainly required of us a considerable degree of indifference about this world, which was only intended to serve us as a passage to a better.

The Divine Being himself has made wise provision for lessening the cares of this world, by the appointment of one day in seven, for the purpose of rest and avocation from labour. Let us then, at least, take the advantage which this day gives us, of "calling off our eyes from beholding vanity," and of "quickening ourselves in the ways of God."

This advice I would particularly recommend to those persons who are engaged in *arts, manufactures* and *commerce.* For, highly beneficial as these things are in a political view, and subservient to the elegant enjoyment of life, they seem not to be so favourable to religion and devotion, as the business of *agriculture;* and for this reason, therefore, probably, among others, the Divine Being forbad commerce to the people of the Jews, and gave them such laws as are chiefly adapted to a life of husbandry. The husbandman is in a situation particularly favourable to the contemplation of the works of God, and to a sense of his dependence upon him. The rain from heaven, and various circumstances relating to the weather, &c. on which the goodness of his crops depends, he receives as from the hand of God, and is hardly sensible of any secon-

dary or more immediate cause. If he understand any thing of the principles of vegetation, and can account for a few obvious appearances upon what we call *the laws of nature;* these laws he knows to be the express appointment of God, and he cannot help perceiving the wisdom and goodness of God in the appointment: so that the objects about which he is daily conversant are, in their nature, a lesson of gratitude and praise.

Besides, the employment of the husbandman being, chiefly, to bring food out of the earth, his attention is more confined to the real wants, or at most the principal conveniences of life; and his mind is not, like that of the curious artist and manufacturer, so liable to be fascinated by a taste for superfluities, and the fictitious wants of men.

Nor, lastly, does the business of husbandry so wholly engross a man's thoughts and attention, while he is employed about it, as many of the arts and manufactures, and as commerce necessarily does. And it should be a general rule with us, that the more attention of mind our employment in life requires, the more careful should we be to draw our thoughts from it, on the day of rest, and at other intervals of time set apart for devotional purposes. Otherwise, a worldly-minded temper, not being checked or controuled by any thing of a contrary tendency, will necessarily get possession of our hearts.

2. This brings me to the second advice, which is, by no means to omit stated times of worshipping God by prayer, public and private. Every passion and affection in our frame is strengthened by the proper and natural expression of it. Thus frequent intercourse and conversation with those we love, promotes friendship; and so also the intercourse we keep up with God by prayer, in which we express our reverence and love of him, and our confidence in him, promotes a spirit of devotion, and makes it easier for the ideas of the Divine Being and his providence to occur to the mind on other occasions, when we are not formally praying to him. Besides, if persons whose thoughts are much employed in the business of this life had no time set apart for the exercises of devotion, they would be in danger of neglecting it entirely; at least, to a degree that would be attended with a great diminution of their virtue and happiness.

But, in order that the exercises of devotion may be the most efficacious to promote the true spirit and general habit of it, it is adviseable that prayers properly so called, that is, direct addesses to the Divine Being, be short. The strong feeling of reverence, love, and confidence, which ought to animate our devotions, cannot be kept up in such minds as ours through a prayer of considerable length; and a tedious languor in prayer is of great disservice to the life of religion, as it accustoms

the mind to think of God with indifference; whereas, it is of the utmost consequence, that the Divine Being always appear to us an object of the greatest importance, and engage the whole attention of our souls. Except, therefore, in public, where prayers of a greater length are, in a manner, necessary, and where the presence and concurrence of our fellow-worshippers assist to keep up the fervour of our common devotion, it seems more adviseable, that devotional exercises have intervals of meditation, calculated to impress our minds more deeply with the sentiments we express; and that they be used without any strict regard to particular times, places, or posture of body.

This method of conducting devotional exercises, which makes them consist chiefly of meditation upon God and his providence, has in many cases several advantages over a direct address to God, which should peculiarly recommend it to those who are desirous to cultivate the genuine spirit of devotion. Among other advantages, and that not the least, in meditation the mind is not so apt to acquiesce in the mere work done (what the schoolmen call the *opus operatum*) as it is in formal prayer, especially when it is made of considerable length. So prone, alas! is the mind of man to superstition, that hardly any thing can be prescribed to us as a means of virtue, but we immediately acquiesce in it as an end; and not only so, but the consequence of a

punctilious observance of prayer, and other means of religion, is too often made the foundation of a spiritual pride, and self-sufficiency, which is of a most alarming nature; being directly opposite to that deep humility and self-abasement, which is ever the predominant disposition of a mind truly devout. The sentiment corresponding to the language "Stand by thyself, I am holier than thou," is not I am afraid, peculiar to the Pharisaical Jew, or the Romish devotee. It infects many protestant religionists, being generated by similar causes. Rather than be liable to this, it is certainly better, far better, even to be less regular in our exercises of devotion. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." "Every one that is proud in heart, is an abomination to the Lord."

3. In the course of your usual employment omit no proper opportunity of turning your thoughts towards God. Habitually regard him as the ultimate cause and proper author of every thing you see, and the disposer of all events that respect yourselves or others. This will not fail to make the idea of God occur familiarly to your mind, and influence your whole conduct.

It is to be regretted, that the taste and custom of this country is such, that a person of a devotional turn of mind cannot indulge himself in the natural expression of it, even upon the most proper and just occasions, without exposing himself to the particu-

lar notice, if not the ridicule, of the generality of those who may be present; whereas, could we decently and seriously express our gratitude to God upon every agreeable occurrence, and our resignation and submission to his will upon every calamitous event of life, it would tend greatly to strengthen the habit of acknowledging God in all our ways, and promote the spirit of devotion.

In no other country, I believe, whatever, neither among the Roman Catholics, nor Mahometans, have people, even the most fashionable and polite, any idea of being ashamed of their religion. On the contrary, they are rather ostentatious of it, and therefore they seem to have more than they are really possessed of: and this is the case with some, both of the established church, and among the Dissenters in England. But, unfortunately, this outward show of religion was carried to such a length, about a century ago, in this country, and was sometimes made to subserve such infamous purposes, that, I believe, the greater part of the most sincerely pious and humble christians now make a point of exposing to the world as little of the religion they have as possible; so that they are really possessed of much more than they seem to have. This I trust is the case with great numbers, who are little suspected of being particularly religious, because they are seldom or never heard to talk about it. And, upon the whole, while things are so unfor-

tunately circumstanced, I think this extreme preferable to the other; as, of all things, the reproach of hypocrisy ought to be avoided with the utmost care.

4. In a more especial manner, never fail to have recourse to God upon every occasion of strong emotion of mind, whether it be of a pleasurable, or of a painful nature. When your mind is labouring under distressing doubts, and great anxiety, or when you are any way embarrassed in the conduct of your affairs, fly to God, as your friend and father, your counsellor and your guide. In a sincere and earnest endeavour to discharge your duty, and to act the upright and honourable part, commit your way unto him, repose yourselves upon his providence, confiding in his care to overrule every thing for the best, and you will find a great, and almost instantaneous relief. Your perturbation of mind will subside, as by a charm, and the storm will become a settled calm. Tumultuous and excessive joy will also be moderated by this means; and thus all your emotions will be rendered more equable, more pleasurable, and more lasting. And this is produced not by any supernatural agency of God on the mind, but is the natural effect of placing entire confidence in a being of perfect wisdom and goodness.

But the capital advantage you will derive from this practice will be, that the idea of God being,

by this means, associated with all the strongest emotions of your mind, your whole stock of devotional sentiments and feelings will be increased. All those strong emotions, now separately indistinguishable, will coalesce with the idea of God, and make part of the complex train of images suggested by the term, so that you will afterwards think of God oftener, and with more fervour than before; and the thought of him will have greater influence with you than ever.

5. In order to cultivate the spirit of habitual devotion, labour to free your minds from all consciousness of guilt, and self-reproach, by means of a constant attention to the upright and steady discharge of the whole of your duty. In consequence of neglecting our duty, we become backward, as we may say, to make our appearance before God. We cannot look up to him with full confidence of his favour and blessing; and are, therefore, too apt to omit devotion entirely. Besides, we always feel an aversion to the exercise of *self-abasement* and *contrition*, which are all the sentiments that we can with propriety indulge in those circumstances; especially as we have a secret suspicion, that we shall, for some time at least, go on to live as we have done; so that rather than confess our sins, and continue to live in them, we choose not to make confession at all.

But this, my brethren, is egregious trifling, and highly dangerous. Thus, at best, all improvement

is at a stand with us, if we be not going fatally backwards in our moral state. If this be our character (as I believe it is, more or less, that of a very great number even of those I have called the better sort of the middle classes of men), let us in time, and in good earnest, cast off all our sins, negligences and follies, by true repentance. Let us draw near, and *acquaint ourselves with God*, that we may be at peace. You can have no true peace, assurance, or satisfaction of mind in this life without it; for, if you be of the class I am now referring to, it is too late for you to have a perfect enjoyment of a life of sin and dissipation. And between that kind of peace, or rather *stupor*, which those who are abandoned to wickedness, those who are wholly addicted to this world and make it their sole end, or those who are grossly ignorant of religion, enjoy, and that *inward peace and satisfaction* which accompanies the faithful and earnest discharge of every known duty, there is no sufficient medium. You may go about seeking rest in this wide space, while you hearts are divided between God and the world, but you will find none; whereas the *fruit of rgihteousness*, of a sincere and impartial, though imperfect obedience to the law of God, *is peace and assurance for ever.*

Sixthly, and lastly. To facilitate the exercise of devotion, cultivate in your minds just ideas of God, with whom you have to do upon those occa-

sions, and divest your minds, as far as possible, of all superstitious and dishonourable notions of him. Consider him as the good father of the prodigal son, in that excellent parable of our Saviour. Let it sink deep into your minds, as one of the most important of all principles, that the God with whom we have to do is essentially, of himself, and without regard to any foreign consideration whatever, "abundant in mercy, not willing that any should perish, but that he had rather that all should come to repentance:" and then, notwithstanding you consider yourselves as frail, imperfect, and sinful creatures; and though you cannot help accusing yourselves of much negligence, folly, and vice, you may still approach him with perfect confidence in his readiness to receive, love, and cherish you, upon your sincere return to him.

In this light our Lord Jesus Christ always represented his Father and our Father, his God and our God. This is the most solid ground of consolation to minds burthened with a sense of guilt; and, what is of great advantage, it is the most natural, the most easy and intelligible of all others. If once you quit this firm hold, you involve yourselves in a system, and a labyrinth, in which you either absolutely find no rest, and wander in uncertainty and horror; or, if you do attain to any thing of assurance, it is of such a kind, and in such a manner, as can hardly fail to feed that spiritual

pride which will lead you to despise others; nay, unless counteracted by other causes, too often ends in a spirit of censoriousness, hatred, and persecution.

Religious melancholy, the most deplorable of all the cases of melancholy, will never be effectually relieved by any consideration but that of the mercy and clemency of the Divine Being. This unhappy state of mind arises from superstition. It consists in an excessive and unreasonable fear of God, and is peculiarly incident to persons of the greatest tenderness of conscience. And if we consider nothing but the holiness of the divine nature, and our proneness to vice and folly, there will be no end of this distressing scrupulosity in the best-disposed minds. But, in our situation, we must learn to acquiesce in the sense of our manifold imperfections, and the unavoidable consequences of them; and to take refuge in the goodness and compassion of God, who "considers our frame, and remembers that we are but dust. This is the part of humility.

So long as we are seeking to justify ourselves in the sight of God (unless our minds be absolutely blinded) we shall not fail to condemn ourselves; for "there is not a man upon earth, not even the most just and righteous man, who doeth good and sinneth not. Yea in many things we offend all:" so that, "if we should say we have no sin, we

should deceive ourselves, and the truth would not be in us: but it is a never-failing source of consolation, that "if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Moreover, let it be considered, by persons labouring under this deplorable calamity, that this fear of displeasing God, and anxiety about our future state, is one of the best evidences we can have that our hearts are, upon the whole, right towards God; that we are seeking first, and before all things else, the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and that we are not so much concerned about the bread that perishes, as about that which endures to everlasting life. Our Saviour said "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted; blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled;" so that this excess of religious fear, producing despondence and melancholy, is a state of greater safety, though it be less pleasing, than that of religious joy.

This fear of God, when it has once exceeded its due bounds, and degenerated into superstition, and when it is not cured by a confidence in the divine mercy and clemency, by that love which casteth out fear, is of a most alarming nature, and has often been productive of the most fatal effects. What is it that superstitious mortals have scrupled either to do, or suffer, in order to recommend

themselves to God? Voluntary pains and penalties, of the most frightful kinds, have not been spared for this purpose; and men like ourselves, yea, the excellent of the earth, men "of whom the world was not worthy," have been persecuted, and massacred, under the idea of doing God service.

I shall, also, here give an admonition concerning another inconvenience, which we are apt to be betrayed into, by imperfect and unworthy conceptions of God. It is that kind of enthusiasm which arises from an excess of religious joy, as the superstition I have just described arises from an excess of religious fear. It is well known, that, in the beginning of a religious life, persons of a warm temper of mind are apt to be carried away with extreme fervour. They are swelled with a tumultuous and rapturous joy, attended with great zeal in the discharge of their duty. But all this is of short continuance, and generally ends in a most unaccountable languor, and even a total indifference about religion, which astonishes them, and which they are apt to consider as the consequence of the presence of God deserting them; that peculiar presence which they supposed to be the cause of the preceding fervour. Also, in this deadness to devotional fervour, and indifference about religion, they are apt to imagine their former experience to have been an illusion. All religion, in that state of their minds, appears like a dream; and they afterwards often fancy themselves to have been

tempted by the devil, to disbelieve and renounce it all, natural and revealed.

But the peculiar warmth of those emotions is owing to the novelty of them, together with a kind of familiarity in our conceptions of God, which leads to such a passionate joy as we naturally indulge with respect to beings like ourselves. But more awful, and on account of the preceding excessive familiarity, too awful ideas of God will follow and check that fond transport. The emotion itself, having been above the usual tenor of the sensations, will of course subside; and the idea of God, being as yet single, as we may say, and not associated with a sufficient variety of other objects, cannot long be retained in the mind, any more than any other single idea unconnected with others. Consequently, other objects, and trains of thought, which we have been before accustomed to, will force themselves upon the mind; and these, not having had any previous connexion with the ideas of God and religion, will exclude them, so that the former religious state of mind will as absolutely disappear for a time, as if it had never existed.

All this, however, is perfectly natural, and will give no alarm to those who have a sufficient knowledge of human nature. In this case, a person who would favour his progress in religion should calmly acquiesce in the imperfection of his devotion. He should give himself, in the intervals of

it, to the steady prosecution of his lawful business, considering *that* as his proper *duty*, as serving mankind and serving God, and therefore by no means foreign to religion; depending upon it, that, if he only be careful to "keep his conscience void of offence," his devotional feelings will return in due time. Let him then endeavour to purify and exalt his conceptions of God as much as possible; for this will tend both to give him humiliating views of himself, and to make his pious emotions more composed, and more permanent. And, by degrees, by frequently endeavouring to raise his views above the world, while he is employed in it, religion will come to be no longer the business of an hour, or of a limited time, with him, but he will, "walk with God all the day long," and proceed in the path of his duty with a calm and equal, a steady and a persevering progress.

I shall conclude this discourse with observing, that if a person should never experience any thing of this fervour of devotion, which I have been endeavouring to describe and explain, I should by no means pronounce him the less safe on that account. This fervour of devotion is in a manner incompatible with the constitution of some persons' minds; and an uniform care to "glorify God in all our actions, and to preserve a conscience void of offence towards God and towards all men," without any thing of that warmth of zeal and devotion, which often delights, but also often misleads others; this,

I say, will certainly be sufficient, according to the gracious constitution of the gospel, to entitle a person to that "glorious recompense of reward," to that eternal life, which awaits all those who, by nothing but "patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality." Our Saviour himself has assured us, that if a man "do the will of God" (he makes no other condition, he describes no particular *feeling*) he shall be to him as a "a brother, a sister, or a mother."

We well know, my Christian brethren, "what it is that the Lord our God requires of us," in order to live and to die in his favour, namely, "to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God." To this plain path of truth, then, let us adhere, without being anxious about any thing further. Whether we have those fervours of devotion, which some feel, and are apt to be proud of, or not, we shall experience that "great peace of mind, which all those have who keep God's law;" and having lived the life of the righteous, our "latter end will also be like his;" the foundation of our joy being "the testimony of our consciences, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world."

It is true, we are imperfect, sinful creatures: but, notwithstanding this, we have all possible encouragement given us to trust in the abundant mercy of our gracious God and Father, in that

mercy which is essential to his nature, as a Being who is infinitely good, and who is love itself; and which, if we could entertain the least doubt concerning it, he fully declared to all the world, by Moses and the prophets, by Jesus Christ and his apostles; whom he sent into the world to preach the grateful doctrine "of repentance and remission of sins, thereby to redeem (i. e. to deliver) us from all iniquity, and to reconcile us to God." Animated, therefore, by the glorious promises of the gospel, "let us," my Christian brethren, "be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labour shall not finally be in vain in the Lord."

SERMON VI.

THE DUTY OF NOT LIVING TO OURSELVES.

ROMANS xiv. 7.

For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

It is the excellence of our rational nature that by it we are capable of living to some known end, and of governing our lives and conduct by some rule; whereas brute creatures necessarily live and act at random, just as the present appetite influences them. Let us then, my brethren, make the most of this our prerogative, by proposing to ourselves the noblest end of human life, and engaging in such a course of actions as will reflect the greatest honour upon our nature, and be productive of the most solid and lasting happiness, both in the performance and review of them.

Agreeably to this, let the principal use we make of our understanding be to discover what the great end of life is; and then let us use the resolution and fortitude that is either natural to us, or acquired by us, in steadily conforming ourselves to it.

But as the regular investigation of the rule of life, from the light of nature only, may be tedious and perhaps at last unsatisfactory, let us, without waiting for the result of such an inquiry upon the principles of reason, take a more clear and sure guide, the holy scriptures, in so important a subject, and see, afterwards, whether reason and experience will not give their sanction to that decision.

The great end of human life is negatively expressed by the apostle Paul in my text. "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself;" and, if we attend to the connection of these words, we shall find what, in the apostle's idea, is the true end to which men ought to live.

The apostle is here treating of a controversy, which had arisen in the Christian church, about the lawfulness of eating meat sacrificed to idols, and keeping holy certain days, together with some other ceremonious observances, and exhorting both parties to do nothing that might give offence, or be a snare to the other, lest, by their means, any one should perish for whom Christ died.

As the best foundation for mutual tenderness and charity, he reminds them that both parties acted, with regard to all ritual observances, as they imagined was the will of Christ. "He that observeth a day, observeth it to the Lord; and he that observeth not a day, to the Lord he observeth it not." And after giving his sanction in the fullest manner to this

maxim, and deciding, with respect to this particular case, that all Christians ought to act according to the will of Christ, and consult the good and the peace of their fellow-Christians, he declares in general, that "no man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself; but whether we live, we live unto the Lord, or whether we die, we die unto the Lord;" that is, in all our actions our views should not be directed to ourselves, but to the interest of our holy religion. And as the Christian religion has for its object the happiness of mankind (since "Christ came to bless us in turning us away from our iniquities"), it is the same thing as if he had said, the great scope of all our conduct should be the real welfare of all to whom our influence can extend.

We should therefore, my brethren, according to this apostolical maxim, by no means confine our regards to ourselves, and have our own pleasure, profit, or advantage in view in every thing we undertake; but look out of, and beyond ourselves, and take a generous concern in the happiness of all our brethren of mankind, making their sorrows our sorrows, their joys our joys, and their happiness our pursuit: and it is in this disinterested conduct, and in this only, that we shall find our own true happiness.

That this is the true rule of human life, will appear, whether we consider the course of nature without us, the situation of mankind in this world, or take a nearer view of the principles of human

nature. And we shall likewise find that several considerations drawn from the holy scriptures will further confirm and illustrate this maxim of human conduct which was first suggested by them.

1. This disinterested conduct of man is most agreeable to the course of nature without us. There is no part of the creation, which will not, if it be viewed attentively, expose the selfishness and narrow-mindedness of men. For, among all that infinite variety of things and creatures which present themselves to our view, not one of them appears to have been made merely for itself but every thing bears a relation to something else. They can hardly be said to afford any matter for contemplation singly, and are most of all the objects of our admiration when considered as connected with other things. The primary uses of things are few, but the secondary uses of every thing are almost infinite. Indeed, the secondary uses of things are so many, that we are lost in the multiplicity of them; whereas we can give no answer, if we be asked what is the primary use of any thing, but this general one, which will equally suit every thing, that every creature which is capable of happiness was made to enjoy that share of it which is suited to its nature.

Now, what do we mean, when we say that the several parts of nature are *adapted to* one another, but that they are *made for the use* of one another? I shall mention only a few of these mutual relations

and uses, beginning with those parts of nature which are the most remote from one another, and whose mutual relations and uses are the least obvious, and proceeding to those in which they are more obvious. The sun, the moon, the planets, and comets, are strictly connected, and combined into one system. Each body, though so exceedingly remote from the rest, is admirably adapted, by its situation, magnitude, and velocity in its orbit, to the state of the whole, in those respects and many others. This connexion, probably, also extends to the remotest bodies in the universe: so that it is impossible to say, that the withdrawing of any one would not, in some respect or other, affect all the rest.

The clouds and the rain are designed to moisten the earth, and the sun to warm it; and the texture and juices of the earth are formed so as to receive the genial influences of both, in order to ripen and bring to perfection that infinite variety of plants and fruits, the seeds of which are deposited in it. Again, is not each plant peculiarly adapted to its proper soil and climate, so that every country is furnished with those productions which are peculiarly suited to it? Are not all plants likewise suited to the various kinds of animals which feed upon them; so that, though they enjoy a kind of life peculiar to themselves, and all the influences they are exposed to be adapted to promote that life, they themselves

are as much adapted to maintain that higher kind of life which is enjoyed by creatures of the animal nature?

The various kinds of animals are again, in a thousand ways, adapted to, and formed for, the use of one another. Beasts of a fiercer nature prey upon the tamer cattle: fishes of a larger size live almost wholly upon those of a less: and there are some birds which prey upon land-animals, others upon fishes, and others upon creatures of their own species.

That brute animals are excellently adapted to the use of man, and were, therefore, made to be subservient to the use of man, man will not deny. The strength of some, and the sagacity of others, are as much at our command, and are as effectually employed for our use, as if they belonged to ourselves. We can even turn to our advantage every passion of their nature; so that we can safely repose the greatest confidence in many of them. They are the guardians of our possessions and of our lives. They even enter into our resentments, and, at our instigation, take part in our revenge.

Having now advanced to man, the chief of this lower creation, and shown that all creatures of the vegetable, and merely animal, nature live and die for his use; pride might bid us here break off the chain of mutual relations and uses, which we have been pursuing thus far, and leave man in the en-

joyment of his superiority: but, beside that it is contrary to the analogy of nature, in which we see nothing but what has innumerable secondary relations and uses, that *man* only should be made for himself.

2. The situation of man in this world, or the external circumstances of human nature, still oblige us to assert, with Paul, that "no man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." Man himself is but a link, though the highest link, of this great chain, all the parts of which are closely connected by the hand of our Divine Author. Nay, the more various and extensive are our powers, either for action or enjoyment, on that very account the more multiplied and extensive are our wants: so that, at the same time that they are marks of our superiority to, they are bonds of our connection with, and signs of our dependence upon, the various parts of the world around us, and of our subservience to one another.

In fact, every time that we gratify any of our senses, though it be in consequence of the exertion of our own powers, we are reminded (if we will be so just to ourselves as to take the hint) of our dependence upon something without us. For the means of our gratifications are, in all cases, evidently without ourselves.

If we be served by the vegetables and the animals which this earth affords, we are obliged, in our

turn, to favour their propagation, to promote their cultivation, and to preserve them in a healthy and vigorous state: and employment of this kind doth, in fact, take up a great part of our attention and labour. We must make the creature in some measure happy, if we would be effectually served by it. And the attention which domestic animals give to us, and their anxiety for us, is not to be compared to the attention we bestow on them, and the anxiety we undergo on their account.

But my subject leads me to attend to the connection which man has with man, rather than with the inferior part of the creation; though it seemed not improper to point out that. In general, nothing can be more obvious than the mutual dependence of men on one another. We see it in the most barbarous countries, where the connections of mankind are the fewest and the slightest. This dependence is more sensible indeed, in a state of infancy, when the least remission of the care of others would be fatal to us; but it is as real and necessary, and even vastly more extensive, though less striking, when we are more advanced in life, especially in civilized countries. And the more perfect is the state of civil society, the more various and extended are the connections which man has with man, and the less able is he to subsist comfortably without the help of others.

The business of human life, where it is enjoyed

in perfection, is subdivided into so many parts (each of which is executed by different hands) that a person who would reap the benefit of all the arts of life in perfection must employ, and consequently be dependent upon, thousands: he must even be under obligations to numbers of whom he has not the least knowledge.

These connections of man with man are every day growing more extensive. The most distant parts of the earth are now connected: every part is every day growing still more necessary to every other part. And the nearer advances we make to general happiness, and the more commodious our circumstances in this world are made for us, the more intimately and extensively we become connected with, and the more closely we are dependent upon, one another.

By thus tracing the progress of man to that state of happiness which he now enjoys, we may be led to think, that, in pursuing it still farther to a more happy state of being, adapted to our social natures, we shall find ourselves still more variously and intimately connected with, and more closely dependent upon, one another; which affords a far nobler and more pleasing prospect to a person of an enlarged mind, and of a social and benevolent disposition, than he could have from supposing, that after death all our mutual connections will be broken, and that every good man will be made transcend-

ently happy within himself, having no intercourse, or, however, no necessary intercourse, with any being beside his Maker.

By these arguments, which are drawn from facts that are obvious to every person who attends to the external circumstances of mankind, it is plain that no man *can* live of himself; and even that the rich are, in fact, more dependent upon others than the poor; for, having more wants, they have occasion for more, and more frequent supplies. Now, it will easily be allowed, that every reason why we cannot live *of* ourselves is an argument why we ought not to live *to* ourselves: for certainly no person receives an obligation, but he ought to confer one. Every connection must, in some measure, be mutual. And, indeed, the circulation of good offices would in a great measure cease, if the passage were not as open, and as free from obstruction, in one part of the common channel as another. The rich, if they would receive the greatest advantages from society, must contribute to the happiness of it. If they act upon different maxims, and think to avail themselves of the pleasures of society without promoting the good of it, they will never know the true pleasures of society. And, in the end, they will be found to have enjoyed the least themselves, who have least contributed to the enjoyment of others.

Thus it appears from a view of the external cir-

circumstances of mankind, that man was not made to live to himself. The same truth may be inferred.

3. From a nearer inspection of the principles of human nature, and the springs of human actions.

If any man look into himself, and consider the springs and motives of his own actions, he will find that there are principles in his nature which would be of no use, were the intercourse he has with his fellow-creatures cut off; for that both the efficient and final causes of their operations are without himself. They are views of mankind, and their situations, which call those principles into action. And if we trace the operation of them, we shall clearly see that, though they be strictly connected with private happiness, their ultimate and proper object is the happiness of society.

What other account can we give of that impulse, which we all, more or less, feel for society? And whence is that restless and painful dissatisfaction which a man feels when he is long excluded from it, but that, in such a solitary condition, his faculties have not their proper exercise, and he is, as it were, out of his proper element?

Whence is that quick sensibility which we are conscious of with respect to both the joys and the sorrows of our fellow-creatures, if their happiness or misery were a matter of indifference to us? Can we feel what is sometimes called the contagion of

the passions, when we find that our minds contract a kind of gloom and heaviness in the company of the melancholy, and that this melancholy vanishes in company which is innocently cheerful, and question the influence of social connections? Much less can the reality or the power of the social principle be doubted, when a fellow-creature in distress calls forth the most exquisite feelings of compassion, attended with instant and strong efforts towards his relief.

So essential a part of our nature are these social passions, that it is impossible for any man wholly to escape the influence of them; but if we would be witnesses of their strongest effects, and see them branched out into that beautiful subordination which corresponds to all the varieties of our mutual relations, we must look into domestic life. There we shall clearly see, that the most frequent and almost the only cause of a man's joys and sorrows are the joys and sorrows of others, and that the immediate aim of all his actions, is the well-being and happiness of others.

Doth not the sense of honor in the human breast derive all its force from the influence which social connections have over us? Of what use could it be but to beings formed for society? What do we infer from our dread of infamy, and from our being so strongly actuated by a passion for fame, and also from the universality and extent of this principle, but that our nature obliges us to keep up a regard

to others in our whole conduct, and that the Author of Nature intended we should? And is it not a further evidence of the ultimate design of this principle, that, in general, the means of being distinguished, at least of gaining a solid and lasting reputation, among men, is to be useful to mankind; public utility being the most direct road to true fame?

Every noble and exalted faculty of our nature is either directly of a social nature, or tends to strenghen the social principle. Nothing can be more evident than that the dictates of conscience strongly enforce the practice of benevolence: and the pleasures of benevolence certainly constitute the greatest part of those pleasures which we refer to the moral sense. They must necessarily do so, while the foundation of all virtue and right conduct is the happiness of society: for then every reflection that we have done our duty must be the same thing as a reflection that we have contributed what was in our power to the good of our fellow-creatures.

Lastly, of what doth devotion itself consist, but the exercise of our social affections? What are the dispositions of our minds which are called forth into action in private or public prayer, but reverence for true greatness, humility, gratitude, love, and confidence in God, as the greatest and best of Beings; qualities of the most admirable use and effect in social life?

I may add, that not only are the highest and the worthiest principles of human conduct either truly social, or a reinforcement of the social principle, but even the lowest appetites and passions of our nature are far from being indifferent to social connexions, considerations, and influences. That the pleasures we receive from the fine arts, as those of music, poetry, and painting, and the like, are enjoyed but very imperfectly except in company, is very evident to all persons who have the least taste for those pleasures. I may even venture to say, that there is hardly a voluptuary, the most devoted to the pleasures of the table, but indulges himself with more satisfaction in company than alone.

Having given this general view of the social turn of our whole natures, whereby we are continually led out of ourselves in our pursuit of happiness; I shall now consider further, how all our appetites and passions, which are the springs of all our actions, do, in their own nature, tend to lead us out of ourselves, and how much our happiness depends upon our keeping their proper objects in view, and upon our minds being thereby constantly engaged upon something foreign to themselves; after which I shall show what are the fittest objects thus to engage our attention.

In order to preserve mutual connexion, dependance, and harmony among all his works, it has

pleased our Divine Author to appoint, that all our appetites and desires, to whatever sense, external or internal, they be referred, should point to something beyond ourselves for their gratification; so that the idea of *self* is not in the least necessary to a state of the highest enjoyment.

When may men be said to be happy, but when their faculties are properly exercised in the pursuit of those things which give them pleasure? I say the pursuit rather than the enjoyment, not because enjoyment makes no part of our happiness, but because the vigorous and agreeable sensations with which our minds are impressed during the pursuit of a favourite object are generally, at least in this life, of vastly more consideration. The pleasure we receive the instant we arrive at the height of our wishes may be more exquisite, but the others are of much longer continuance; and, immediately upon the gratification of any of our desires, the mind is instantly reaching after some new object.

Supposing now the mind of any person to be fully and constantly engaged in the pursuit of a proper object, to the possession of which he is sensible he every day makes near approaches, and his desires be not so eager as to make him uneasy during the pursuit, what more is requisite to make him as happy as his nature can bear? He will not be the less happy because the object he is in pursuit of is foreign to himself; nor would it make him any happier to

have the idea of its contributing to his happiness. Nay, it may be shown, that it would be better for us, in general, with respect to real enjoyment, never to have the idea of the relation which the objects of our pursuit bear to ourselves: and this is most of all evident with respect to the higher pleasures of our nature, from which we derive our greatest happiness.

Our benevolence, for instance, leads us immediately to relieve and oblige others. Pleasure, indeed, always attends generous actions, and is consequent upon them; but the satisfaction we receive in our minds from having done kind offices to others is far less pure, and less perfectly enjoyed, if at all, when we had this, or any other private gratification in view before the action.

In like manner, he who courts applause, and does worthy actions solely with a view to obtain it, can have no knowledge of the genuine pleasure arising either from the good action itself, or the applause that is given to it; because he is sensible, in his own mind, that if those persons who praise his conduct were acquainted with the real motive of it, and knew that he meant nothing more, by his pretended acts of piety and benevolence, than to gain their applause, they would be so far from admiring and commending, that they would despise him for it.

It is evident, for the same reason, that no person

can enjoy the applause of his own mind, on the account of any action which he did with a view to gain it. The pleasures of a good conscience, or, as they are sometimes called, those of the moral sense, cannot be enjoyed but by a person who steadily obeys the dictates of his conscience, and uniformly acts the part which he thinks to be right, without any view to the pleasure and self-satisfaction which may arise from it.

The idea of *self*, as it is not adapted to gratify any of our appetites, and can contribute nothing towards their gratification, can only occasion anxiety, fear, and distrust about our happiness, when it is frequently the subject of our thoughts. The apprehension and dread of misery (which is certainly the occasion of most of the real trouble and misery of men in this life) is beyond measure increased from this source: and the effects of it are most sensibly felt both in the less and greater scenes of our lives.

It is chiefly an anxious solicitude about ourselves, and the appearance we shall make in the eyes of others, which is the cause of that affectation and constraint in behaviour which is so troublesome to a person's self, and so ridiculous in the eyes of others. This trifling remark, being so frequently verified, may serve to show that these sentiments are by no means merely speculative; but that they enter into the daily scenes of active life. Indeed they are in the highest sense practical, and upon

them depend those maxims of conduct which contain the great secret of human happiness, and which are confirmed by every day's experience.

That the idea of *self* frequently occurring to our minds in our pursuit of happiness is often a real and great obstruction to it, will be more obvious from a short series of plain facts and examples, which I shall therefore mention.

Why are brute creatures, in general, so contented and happy in their low sphere of life, and much more so than the mind of man could be in their situation? Is it not because their views are perpetually fixed upon some object within their reach, adapted to their desires; and that the abstract idea of *self*, together with the notion of their being in the pursuit of happiness, and liable to be disappointed in that pursuit, never comes in their way, to interrupt the uniform and pleasurable exertion of their faculties in the pursuit of their proper objects?

The days of our infancy are happy for the same reason, notwithstanding the imperfection of our faculties, and the greater proportion of pains and disorders we are then liable to. Those years of our lives slide away in unmixed enjoyment; except when they are interrupted by the actual sensations of pain: for we are then incapable of suffering any thing from the *fear* of evil. It is not till after a considerable time that we get the abstract idea of *self*; an idea, which the brutes, probably, never

arrive at, and which is of excellent use to us, as will be shown in its proper place, in our pursuit of happiness, but is often abused to the great increase of our misery, as will appear by the facts we are now considering.

Why are persons whose situation in life obliges them to constant labour, either of body or mind, generally more happy than those whose circumstances do not lay them under a necessity to labour, and whose own inclination does not lead them to it; but because the former have their thoughts constantly employed in the pursuit of some end, which keeps their faculties awake, and fully exerted? and this is always attended with a state of vigorous, and consequently pleasurable sensations. Persons thus employed have not much leisure to attend to the idea of self and that anxiety which always attends the frequent recurring of it; whereas a person who has no object foreign to himself, which constantly and necessarily engages his attention, cannot have his faculties fully exerted; and therefore his mind cannot possibly be in that state of vigorous sensation in which happiness consits.

The mind of such a person, having nothing without him sufficient to engage its attention, turns upon itself. He feels he is not happy, but he sees not the reason of it. This again excites his wonder, vexation, and perplexity. He tries new expedients; but, as these are only temporary, and

generally whimsical choices, none of them have sufficient power to fix and confine his attention. He is still perpetually thinking about himself, and wondering and uneasy that he is not happy. This anxious perplexed state of mind, affecting the nervous system, necessarily occasions a more irritable state of the nerves, and of the brain, which makes the unhappy person subject to more frequent alarms, to greater anxiety and distress than before; till, these mental and bodily disorders mutually increasing one another, his condition is at length the most wretched and distressing that can be conceived. No bodily pain, no rack, no torture, can equal the misery and distress of a human being whose mind is thus a prey to itself. No wonder that, in this situation, many persons wish the utter extinction of their being, and often put a period to their lives.

This is certainly the most deplorable situation to which a human being can be reduced in this world, and is doubly the object of our compassion, when the disorder has its seat originally in the body, in such a manner, as that no endeavours to engage a man's thoughts upon other objects can force his attention from himself.

It is no wonder that we see more of this kind of unhappiness in the higher ranks of life, and among persons who are in what is called easy circumstances,

than in any other. Indeed, the case is hardly possible in any other than in easy circumstances; for, did a man's circumstances really find constant employment for his thoughts; were his business so urgent as to leave him no leisure for suspense and uncertainty what to do; it is plain from the preceding principles, that such anxiety and distress could not take place. It is well known that the mind suffers more in a state of uncertainty and suspense, for want of some motive to determine a man's choice, than he can suffer in the vigorous prosecution of the most arduous undertaking. I appeal to men of leisure, and particularly to persons who are naturally of an active and enterprising disposition, for the truth of this fact.

These principles likewise, as is evident without entering into a detail of particulars, furnish us with a good reason why we generally see fathers and mothers of large families infinitely more easy, cheerful and happy, than those persons who have no family-connexions. The greater affluence, ease, and variety of pleasures which these can command (subject to the inconveniences I have mentioned, and which are commonly visible enough in the case I refer to) are a poor equivalent for the necessary, constant, and vigorous exertion of their faculties, and constantly the strong sensations and lively enjoyments, which a variety of family cares, con-

jugal and parental tenderness, supply for the others.

This would be the case universally, where large families could subsist, if the parents had sufficient employment, and if an early-acquired taste for superfluities had not taken too deep root in their minds.

Happy is it for the world, and a great mark of the wisdom and goodness of Divine Providence, that men's minds are so constituted, that, though they be in easy circumstances, they are never completely satisfied. The passions of most men are still engaging them in a variety of pursuits, in which they are as eager, and which they prosecute with as much alacrity and earnestness, as if necessity compelled them to it. Otherwise, every person who could live easy would be inevitably miserable.

Infinitely happier would it be for themselves, and for the world, if all their pursuits were such as would give them satisfaction upon the reflection as well as in the pursuit, and be of real advantage to the rest of mankind; which two circumstances never fail to coincide. However, with regard to a person's self in this life, any end is unspeakably better than no end at all; and such is the wise appointment of Providence, that bad ends tend, in a variety of ways, to check and defeat themselves, and to throw the minds of men into better, nobler, and more satisfactory pursuits; a consideration,

which cannot fail to suggest to a benevolent and pious mind, a prospect of a future happy and glorious state of things.

It may be said, that if happiness consist in, or depend upon, the exertion of our faculties upon some object foreign to ourselves, it is a matter of indifference what the object be. I answer, that during the pursuit it is nearly so; and universal experience, I imagine, will justify the observation. This is the reason why we see men equally eager, and equally happy in the pursuit of a variety of things which appear trifling to one another. Thus the florist, the medalist, the critic, the antiquary, and every adept in the minuter branches of science, all enjoy equal happiness in the pursuit of their several objects; and as much as the historian, the astronomer, the moralist, or the divine, who refers his nobler studies to no higher end, and to whom they only serve as an exercise of his faculties.

But though an eager pursuit tends to keep the mind in a state of vigorous and lively sensation, that pursuit only can give us the *maximum*, the highest possible degree, of happiness, which has the following characters. It must be attended with the probability of success, consequently it must be generally successful; and it must also terminate in such gratifications as are least inconsistent with themselves, or with the other gratifications of which our nature makes us capable. And it may be de-

monstrated (though I shall not undertake to do it particularly in this place) that no pursuits answer to this description but those in which the love or mankind, the love of God, or the dictates of conscience, engage us.

For in all other pursuits, such as those of sensual pleasure, the pleasures of imagination, and ambition, we are liable to frequent disappointments; the gratifications in which they terminate are inconsistent with themselves, and with each other; and they almost entirely deaden and disqualify the mind for the nobler pleasures of our nature. It is the love of God, the love of mankind, and a sense of duty, which engage the minds of men in the noblest of all pursuits. By these we are carried on with increasing alacrity and satisfaction. Even the pains and distresses in which we involve ourselves by these courses are preferable to the pleasures attending the gratification of our lower appetites.

Besides, these noble pursuits, generally at least, allow us even more of the lower gratifications of our nature than can be obtained by a direct pursuit of them. For a little experience will inform us, that we receive the most pleasure from these lower appetites of our nature, as well as from the highest sources of pleasure which we are capable of, when we have their gratification least of all in view. There can be no doubt, for instance, but that the labourer, who eats and drinks merely to satisfy the calls of

hunger and thirst, has vastly more pleasure in eating and drinking than the epicure who studies the pleasing of his palate.

They are the pleasures of benevolence and piety which most effectually carry us out of ourselves; whereas every other inferior pursuit suggests to us, in a thousand respects, the idea of *self*, the unseasonable intervention of which may be called the *worm* which lies *at the root* of all human bliss. And never can we be completely happy, till we "love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; and our neighbour as ourselves."

This is the Christian *self-annihilation*, and a state of the most complete happiness to which our natures can attain; when, without having the least idea of being in the pursuit of our own happiness, our faculties are wholly absorbed in those noble and exalted pursuits, in which we are sure not to be finally disappointed, and in the course of which we enjoy all the consistent pleasures of our whole nature; when, "rejoicing with all that rejoice, weeping with all that weep," and intimately associating the idea of God, the maker of all things, our Father and our friend, with all the works of his hands, and all the dispensations of his Providence, we constantly triumph in the comfortable sense of the divine presence and approbation, and in the transporting prospect of advancing every day nearer to the ac-

complishment of his glorious purposes for the happiness of his creatures.

If this be the proper and supreme happiness of man, it may be asked, Of what use is the principle of self-interest? I answer, that though an attention to it be inconsistent with pure unmixed happiness, yet a moderate attention to it is of excellent use in our progress towards it. It serves as a scaffold to a noble and glorious edifice, though it be unworthy of standing as any part of it. It is of more particular use to check and restrain the indulgence of our lower appetites and passions, before other objects and motives have acquired sufficient power over us. But though we ought, therefore, to exhort those persons who are immersed in sensuality and gross vices, to abandon those indulgences out of a regard to their true interest, it is advisable to withdraw this motive by degrees. However, as we shall never arrive at absolute perfection, we necessarily must, and indeed ought to be influenced by it more or less through the whole course of our existence, only less and less perpetually.

The principle of self-interest may be regarded as a medium between the lower and the higher principles of our nature, and therefore of principal use in our transition, as we may call it, from an imperfect to a more perfect state.

Perhaps the following view of this subject may be the easiest to us. A regard to our greatest hap-

piness must necessarily govern our conduct with respect to all those virtues which are termed *private virtues*, as temperance, chastity, and every branch of self-government; but it always does harm as a motive to the *social virtues*. When, therefore, self-government, which is our first step towards happiness, is established, we ought to endeavour to excite men to action by higher and nobler motives. For, with regard to all those virtues, the ultimate object of which is not private happiness, an attention to self-interest is of manifest prejudice to us; and this through the whole course of our lives, imperfect as we are, and as much occasion as we have for every effectual motive to virtue.

We are now come, in the last place, to see what considerations drawn from the holy scriptures will further confirm and illustrate this maxim of human conduct which was first suggested by them.

That the scriptures join the voice of all nature around us, informing man that he is not made for himself; that they inculcate the same lesson which we learn both from a view of the external circumstances of mankind, and also from a nearer inspection of the principles of human nature, will be evident, whether we consider the object of the religion they exhibit (that is, the temper to which we are intended to be formed by it), or the motives by which it is enforced and recommended to us in them.

That the end and design of our holy religion, Christians, was to form us to the most disinterested benevolence, cannot be doubted by any person who consults the holy scriptures, and especially the books of the New Testament.

There we plainly see the principle of benevolence represented, when it is in its due strength and degree, as equal in point of intenseness to that of self-love. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." The plain consequence of this is, that if all our brethren of mankind with whom we are connected have an equal claim upon us (since our connections are daily growing more extensive, and we ourselves are consequently growing daily of less relative importance in our own eyes), the principle of benevolence must in the end absolutely swallow up that of self-love.

The most exalted devotion, as even superior both to self-love and benevolence, is always every where recommended to us; and the sentiments of devotion have been shewn greatly to aid, and, in fact, to be the same with, those of benevolence: and they must be so, unless it can be shewn that we have some senses, powers, or faculties which respect the Deity only.

In order to determine men to engage in a course of disinterested and generous actions, every motive which is calculated to work upon human nature is employed. And as mankind in general are deeply

immersed in vice and folly, their hopes, but more especially their fears, are acted upon in the strongest manner by the prospect of rewards and punishments. Even temporal rewards and punishments were proposed to mankind in the earlier and ruder ages of the world. But, as our notions of happiness grow more enlarged, infinitely greater, but indefinite, objects of hope and fear are set before us. Something unknown, but something unspeakably dreadful, in a future world, is perpetually held up to us, as a guard against the allurements to vice and excess which the world abounds with. And still further to counteract their baleful influences, the heavenly world (the habitation of good men after death) is represented to us as a place in which we shall be completely happy, enjoying something which is described as more than eye hath seen, ear heard, or than the heart of man can conceive.

These motives are certainly addressed to the principle of self-interest, urging us, out of a regard to ourselves and our general happiness, "to cease to do evil, and learn to do well." And, indeed, no motives of a more generous nature, and drawn from more distant considerations, can be supposed sufficient to influence the bulk of mankind, and "bring them from the power of sin, and Satan, unto God."

But when, by the influence of these motives, it may be supposed that mankind are in some measure

ecovered from the grosser pollutions of the world, and the principle of self interest has been played, as it were, against itself, and been a means of engaging us in a course and habit of actions which are necessarily connected with, and productive of, more generous and noble principles, then these nobler principles are those which the sacred writers chiefly inculcate.

Nothing is more frequent with the sacred writers, than to exhort men to the practice of their duty as the command of God, from a principle of love to God, of love to Christ, and of love to mankind, more especially of our fellow-Christians; and from a regard to the interest of our holy religion: motives which do not at all turn the attention of our minds upon themselves. This is not borrowing the aid of self-love to strengthen the principles of benevolence and piety; but it is properly deriving additional strength to these noble dispositions, as it were, from within themselves, independent of foreign considerations.

We may safely say, that no degree or kind of self-love is made use of in the scriptures, but what is necessary to raise us above that principle. And some of the more refined kinds of self-love, how familiar soever they may be in some systems of morals, never come in sight there. We are never exhorted in the scriptures to do benevolent actions for the sake of the reflex pleasures of benevolence,

or pious actions with a view to the pleasures of devotion. This refined kind of self-love is no where to be found in the scriptures.

Even the pleasures of a good conscience, though they be of a more general nature, and there be less refinement in them than in some other pleasures which are connected with the idea of *self*, and though they be represented in the scriptures as the consequence of good actions, and a source of joy, as a testimony of a person's being in the favour of God, and in the way to happiness, are perhaps never directly proposed to us as the reward of virtue. This motive to virtue makes a greater figure in the system of the later stoics (those heathen philosophers who, in consequence of entertaining the most extravagant idea of their own merit, really idolized their own natures to a degree absolutely blasphemous) than in the scriptures. And if we consider the nature of this principle, we shall soon be sensible, that if it be inculcated as a motive to virtue, and particularly the virtues of a sublimer kind, it should be with great caution, and in such a manner as shall have the least tendency to encourage self-applause. For, does not self-applause border very nearly upon pride and self-conceit, and that species of it which is called spiritual pride, and which is certainly a most malignant disposition?

If this same principle have power to excite such ridiculous vanity, intolerable arrogance, inveterate

rancour, and supercilious contempt of others, when it has nothing but the trifling advantage of skill in criticism, a talent for poetry, a taste for belles lettres, or some other of the minuter parts of science, to avail itself of; what have we not to dread from it, when it can boast of what is universally acknowledged to be a far superior kind of excellence!

To guard against this dangerous rock, so fatal to every genuine principle of virtue, the utmost humility, self-diffidence, and trust in God, are ever recommended to us in the holy scriptures. Good men are taught to regard Him as the giver of every good and every perfect gift. They are represented as disclaiming all the merit of their own good works, and expecting all favour and happiness, private or public, from the free goodness and undeserved mercy of God. "When we have done all that is commanded us, we must say we are unprofitable servants, we have done *only* that which it was our duty to do."

In the representation which our Saviour has given us of the proceedings of the last great day of judgment, it is in this respect that the temper of the righteous is contrasted with that of the wicked, though that was not the principal design of the representation. The righteous seem surprised at the favourable opinion which their judge expresses of them, and absolutely disclaim all the

good works which he ascribes to them. "When saw we thee," say they, "hungry, and fed thee; or thirsty, and gave thee drink; when saw we thee a stranger and took thee in, or naked and clothed thee; when saw we thee sick and in prison, and came unto thee?" Whereas the wicked are represented as equally surprised at the censure our Lord passes upon them, and insist upon their innocence; saying, "When saw we thee hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?"

This, too, is the excellent moral conveyed to us in the parable of the pharisee and the publican; and the import of one of the blessings which our Lord pronounced in a solemn manner at the beginning of his ministry on earth, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven;" and also the spirit of many of our Lord's invectives against the pride and hypocrisy of the scribes and pharisees.

No other vice seems capable of disturbing the equal and generous temper of our Lord. Other vices rather excite his compassion: but pride, together with its usual attendant hypocrisy, never fails to rouse his most vehement indignation; insomuch that, before we attend to the heinous nature and dreadful consequences of those vices, we are apt rather to blame our Lord for intemperate wrath upon these occasions, and to wonder why a person,

who otherwise appears to be so meek, should, in this case only, be so highly provoked.

How severely doth he check the least tendency towards pride and ambition in his own disciples, whenever he discovers in any of them a disposition to aspire to distinction and superiority! closing his admonition, on one remarkable occasion, with these words, which are characteristic of the temper of his religion; Matt. xxiii. 11, 12. "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant: Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

What temper can be supposed more proper to qualify us for joining the glorious assembly of the spirits of just men made perfect, and perhaps innumerable orders of beings far superior to us both in understanding and goodness, when all the splendour of the invisible world shall be thrown open to us, but a spirit of the deepest humility, and the purest benevolence? This alone can dispose us truly to rejoice in the view of every kind and degree of excellence wherever found, without the least uneasiness arising from pride, envy, jealousy, or dislike; all which vicious qualities of the mind are nearly connected together. And how can a spirit of true humility and pure benevolence, which cannot exist without humility, be attained, if our regards be perpetually, or frequently, directed to ourselves? Where *self* is considered, pride, vanity,

or self-conceit, with all their hateful consequences, seem, in some degree, to be unavoidable.

Whoever, therefore, lays the foundation of human virtue on the principle of self-interest, or, what is nearly the same thing, self-applause, is erecting a fabric which can never rest on such supports: and he will be found in fact to have been pulling down with one hand what he was endeavouring to build up with the other.

To draw to a conclusion. This doctrine abounds with the noblest practical uses, and points out directly the great rule of life, and source of happiness: which is, to give ourselves wholly up to some employment, which may, if possible, engage all our faculties, and which tends to the good of society. This is a field which is open to the exertion of all human powers, and in which all mankind may be equally, mutually, and boundlessly happy.

This will render all expedients to *kill time* unnecessary. With our affections and our faculties thus engrossed by a worthy object, we scarcely need to fear being ever dull, pensive, or melancholy, or to know what it is to have our time hang heavy upon our hands. And I think I may so far presume upon the known connection of mind and body, as to say, that this is the best preservative against hypochondriacal disorders, to which persons whose situation in the world doth not lead them into the active scenes of life are peculiarly subject. Every day passed in the

steady and earnest discharge of a man's known duty will pass with uniform cheerfulness and alacrity. And in the glorious animating prospect of a future happy state of mankind, on which, in an humble trust and confidence in the assistance and grace of God, he has spent all his cares and exerted all his powers, that joy will spring up in his heart here, which will hereafter be "unspeakable and full of glory."

If troubles and persecutions arise on account of our adhering to our duty; if we be opposed in the prosecution of laudable undertakings, or suffer in consequence of undertaking them; the true piety of a person who habitually lives to God, and not to himself, is capable of converting them all into pure unmixed joy and transport. Then the human mind, roused to the most intense exertion of all its faculties, burdened with no consciousness of guilt, referring itself absolutely to the disposal of its God and Father, distrusting its own powers, and confiding in the infinite power, wisdom, and goodness of God, acquires a fervour of spirit, a courage, fortitude, and magnanimity, tempered with the most perfect serenity, and the greatest presence of mind, that is sufficient, and more than sufficient, to bear a man through every difficulty, and even to convert all pain into pleasure. His highly agitated state of mind, in those trying circumstances, is almost pure rapture and ecstacy.

In those circumstances, which appear so distressing,

numbers, I doubt not, have been able, according to our blessed Saviour's direction, to "rejoice and be exceeding glad, knowing that their reward was great in heaven;" and have experienced more real comfort, peace of mind, and inward joy, in the greatest adversity, than they had ever felt in the days of their prosperity. Yea, what is related by historians of some christian and protestant martyrs appears to me not incredible; namely, that in the midst of flames they have felt no pain. Their minds were so intensely agitated, and so wholly occupied with opposite sensations of the most exalted nature, as to exclude all external sensation whatever, vastly more than we can form any idea of from the trances and reveries which any person was ever subject to.

What the extraordinary exercises of devotion are able to do upon extraordinary occasions, the habitual moderate exercise of piety will be able to do in the ordinary course and the common troubles of our lives; so that it may not only be compared to a strong cordial, to be applied when the mind is ready to faint under adversity, but to that food which is the daily support of our lives.

To have God always in our thoughts, is not possible in this world. Present objects, to the influence of which we are continually exposed, must necessarily engage a great part of our attention; and worldly objects, by continually engrossing our thoughts, are apt to become of too great import-

ance to us. We grow anxious about them, and our minds are harassed and fatigued with a constant and close attention to them. Now, it is when the mind is in this state, or rather tending towards it, that the benign influences of devotion are, in the ordinary course of our lives, the most sensibly felt; when the mind, looking off, and above all worldly objects, and deeply impressed with a sense of the infinite power, wisdom and goodness of God, unburdens itself of every anxiety, and casts all its cares upon its heavenly Father; and when the preceding tumult and disorder in the passions only serves to augment that unspeakable joy, satisfaction and confidence, with which a deep sense of the presence and providence of God inspires the soul.

The relief which a benevolent mind feels from communicating its troubles and cares to an intimate friend, in whose wisdom and integrity he can confide, though of the same nature, is but a faint image of what the truly pious soul feels in the delightful seasons of the devout intercourse which he maintains with his God.

This is a perpetual source of joy and satisfaction to a truly devout mind, which the wicked, those persons who live to themselves and not to mankind, or to God, intermeddle not with. Not even an idea of that sweet tranquillity, exalted joy, and calm fortitude which true devotion inspires, can be communicated to another who hath had no experience of it himself.

This is true of those things of which St. Paul says that "the animal man cannot comprehend them," and that "they are foolishness to him, because they are spiritually discerned."

I would be no advocate for enthusiasm. The fervour of devotion cannot always be kept up. That is inconsistent with the condition of our nature, and far from being necessary in our present state: but that cheerful serenity and composure in which moderate acts of devotion leave the mind, is an excellent temper for entering upon, and persevering with spirit and alacrity in, any useful and honourable undertaking.

The sum of this practical doctrine, suggested by revelation, and confirmed by reason and observation, is, that NO MAN CAN BE HAPPY WHO LIVES TO HIMSELF; BUT THAT TRUE HAPPINESS CONSISTS IN HAVING OUR FACULTIES WHOLLY ENGROSSED BY SOME WORTHY OBJECT, IN THE PURSUIT OF WHICH THE STRONGEST AND BEST OF OUR AFFECTIONS HAVE THEIR FULL PLAY, AND IN WHICH WE ENJOY ALL THE CONSISTENT PLEASURES OF OUR WHOLE NATURE; that though a regard to our greatest happiness be of excellent use, particularly about the beginning of our progress towards perfection and happiness, in bringing our inferior appetites and passions into due subjection to the superior powers of our nature; yet that self-love and a regard to ourselves, is very apt to grow too intense, and is

in fact the cause of a great deal of the useless anxiety, perplexity, and misery which is in the world; and that therefore it ought to be our care, that our minds be engrossed as much as possible by other objects; and that even motives to virtue which turn our attention frequently upon ourselves should be used with caution; for fear of feeding that vanity and self-conceit which we ought to study every method of repressing, as the greatest bane of true religion, being most opposite to the genuine temper of christianity, and most destructive of human happiness.

I cannot make a better application of this general maxim of conduct, namely, to propose to ourselves, and, in the language of Solomon, "to pursue with all our might," some worthy object, some honourable and useful employment, especially in the present circumstances of things among us, than in encouraging you, my brethren in the ministry, to prosecute with vigour that excellent scheme in which you have already shewn so much laudable zeal, and have made so successful a progress. I need not add, that I mean the scheme of a provision for the more comfortable support of ministers' widows and orphans.

This particular subject has the easiest and happiest connection imaginable with the general one I have been discussing; as it is both a worthy and benevolent undertaking itself, and is designed for the relief of those persons who have shown themselves to be actuated by the same excellent sentiments; of persons who have

not lived to themselves, but to society; who have entered into the social connections of life, and who have exposed themselves and families to peculiar hardships in consequence of those honourable connections.

If any set of duties shine with peculiar lustre, and make a greater figure than the rest, in our holy religion, they are those of humanity and compassion. Through all the books both of the Old and New Testament, they are the most frequently, and the most earnestly, inculcated of any particular duties: doubtless, because they are of the strongest obligation in themselves, the finest exercise for our faculties (having the greatest tendency to advance the perfection of our nature), and the best adapted to promote the ease and happiness of mankind in general.

The Divine Being himself is always represented as taking particular notice of the treatment which the poor and distressed meet with. He hath styled himself the "father of the fatherless, and the widow's God:" and therefore, when we undertake those humane and kind offices, we may, with more propriety than in any other sphere, consider ourselves as acting the glorious part of God's deputies, and as stewards of the divine grace and goodness here below.

If we be obliged to contribute of our substance to the relief of the distressed, much more is it incumbent upon us not to withhold our labour and our interest in the prosecution of proper schemes for their relief. And the method in which it is proposed to relieve

the distressed persons we have now under consideration is one that is quite free from all the difficulties which lie in the way of common charities (though the objections to common charities have no weight in this particular case), and a method which is, in all cases, the most eligible, when it can be pursued with effect; namely, to put those persons whose circumstances are distressing, or liable to be so, in the way of relieving themselves. It is to exert our humanity in the way of encouraging, if not industry, at least frugality.

This, consequently, is a method which will relieve the minds of the distressed of a burthen which is often less tolerable than most kinds of calamity, namely, the sense of dependence and obligation. It may be a false kind of delicacy which makes some persons so extremely sensible upon these occasions: but it is a sensibility which only the most amiable and deserving persons are subject to; and there is certainly a peculiar propriety in attending to this circumstance in the case before us.

Who are, generally, the unhappy widows whose case we are now considering, but persons who have been brought up in easy and genteel circumstances, and whose small fortunes, joined to the income of their husbands, and managed with great frugality, have been just sufficient to bring up a family in that decent and reputable manner, in which a regard to their station in life, and to the congregations in whose service their husbands were engaged, are uni-

versally acknowledged to require? These unhappy persons, therefore, are reduced at once, upon the death of their husbands, and the great reduction, if not total ceasing, of their incomes (which is the immediate consequence of that event), to one of the most distressing situations that can occur in human life.

Here is to be seen the deepest affliction for the loss of that companion and friend for whose sake they had sacrificed perhaps better prospects, and situations in which it would have been more in their power to support themselves and families in the like circumstances; the greatest indigence, to which they have never been accustomed, with which they are therefore wholly unprepared to encounter, and which, in their time of life, they are utterly incapable of remedying; and all this joined with that generosity of sentiment, inspired by their education, and cherished by the company and acquaintance they have always kept up, to which relief itself is distressing, unless conferred with the greatest prudence and delicacy.

To augment the distress of these disconsolate widows, they see nothing before them but a number of children educated in the same decent and frugal manner in which their parents were obliged to live, with expectations (if they be of an age capable of having any) almost unavoidably above their rank and fortune, wholly unprovided for, and destitute, in a great measure, of their fathers' interest and friend-

ships, on which were founded all their expectations of being introduced with tolerable prospects into the world.

Here then, my brethren, are the worthiest objects of charity, and here is the most unexceptionable and desirable method of bestowing it; so that no circumstance seems wanting to engage every benevolent and public-spirited person to join heartily in a scheme which is calculated for so excellent a purpose.

Consider, my brethren, how many worthy persons are anxious about the prudence and the vigour of your present resolutions; with what tender and heart-piercing concern the worthy and pious parent regards the wife of his bosom, and the children of his love, when he feels the symptoms of his own declining nature, and dreads to communicate the alarming intelligence; and how earnestly he wishes it may be in his power to do something, while living, which, when he is dead, may be the means of providing a small substitute for the fruit of his present labours; when, alas! no substitute can be provided for himself, for his advice, his instructions, his consolations, the charms of his conversation, and all his personal kind offices. Of what a load of anxiety and distress, which tends to hasten the dreaded event, would this scheme ease the worthiest and most considerate of human minds!

Consider also, how many persons, the best qualified

to bear their parts with propriety and honour in social life, and to exhibit the finest example of the several relative and domestic duties to others, and who are thereby capable of having their own usefulness greatly extended, are restrained from engaging in social connections by that peculiar tenderness and humanity, which a liberal education, and a life devoted to the service of a benevolent religion inspires; and also by that very prudence, which would eminently contribute to their fulfilling the most important duties of it in the most exemplary manner.

So excellent an undertaking will doubtless be its own sufficient reward; and if "the fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," what good may you not reasonably expect that the devout blessings and fervent prayers of the many excellent persons interested in your present resolutions will procure you, from that God "who is able to make all grace abound towards you, and to supply all your wants, out of his abundant fulness in Christ Jesus?"

Let *us* then, my brethren, "be stedfast and unmoveable" in this, as well as "always abounding in every good work; forasmuch as we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."

SERMON VII.

OF THE DANGER OF BAD HABITS.

HOSEA iv. 17.

Ephraim is joined to idols. Let him alone.

EPHRAIM is here put for the whole kingdom of Israel, of which it was a part; and this awful sentence pronounced upon it was delivered during its declension, and not long before its final dissolution by the Kings of Assyria.

Many prophets had God sent to this unhappy nation, and by repeated messages had he expostulated with them, from time to time, for their crying wickedness and provocations. They had had *line upon line* and *precept upon precept;* but all had been to no purpose. They showed no sign of repentance, but "held fast their iniquity, and would not let it go" till the divine patience and forbearance were wearied out. Mercy could plead for them no longer, their fate was determined; and the execution of the just judgments of God upon them was only delayed, but was sure to take place in the end.

This is the case of a whole nation abandoned of God in this fearful manner. But whatever has been the case of one nation may not only be the case of

another nation, but also that of any individual; and it is the possibility of this being the case of our own nation, or of ourselves, that makes it to demand our attention. To the Almighty, with respect to moral government, a nation is as one man, and one man as a whole nation. He punishes vice, and he rewards virtue, in both; and whatever is agreeable to wisdom and equity in the case of a nation; is likewise agreeable to wisdom and equity with respect to individuals. Supposing, therefore, that the cases are exactly similar, I shall, in discoursing from these words,

First, State the case with as much exactness as I can;

Secondly, Show the probability and danger of it with respect to human nature; and

Thirdly, Consider the equity and propriety of it with respect to God; applying the whole doctrine to the cases of individuals.

In the first place, I am to state this case with as much exactness as I can.

In general, when any person is in the condition of Ephraim in my text, so that God shall, as it were, say of him, *he is joined to idols* (he is joined to his lusts and vices), *let him alone*, his day of trial and probation may be said to be, to all important purposes, expired. He is no longer *a subject of moral government*, because he is utterly incapable of *amendment*, which is the end of all moral discipline; and though, through the goodness of God, which is over all his works, he

may live many years longer, yet his final doom is in reality fixed; his sentence is irrevocable, and the execution of it only deferred.

Not that the reformation of any sinner is ever *naturally impossible*, or that, if he truly repent, he shall not find favour at the hand of God. For "nothing is impossible with God," and a "truly humble, penitent, and contrite heart he will never despise," whenever and wheresoever he finds it. But the change may be *morally impossible*, or not to be expected according to the usual course of things; and this is sufficient to authorize us to make use of the language.

Supposing a man to have lived so long in the habits of vice, as to have lost all relish for every thing that is good, that he has no pleasure in the company of the sober, the virtuous, and the pious, but only in that of those who are as abandoned as himself, and that the greatest satisfaction he has is in corrupting others (and further than this, depravity cannot go); supposing that, in the course of his life, this man, besides every advantage for *instruction*, had experienced a great variety of prosperity and adversity; and yet that prosperity, instead of making him more thankful and obedient to God, made him forget him the more; and that afflictions, instead of softening and bettering his heart, only served to harden it, and make it worse: Do I say that this abandoned wretch *cannot* be reformed, that God cannot, by any methods whatever,

work upon his heart, and bring him to serious thought and reflection? By no means. That would be to limit the power of God, to whom all things are possible. He can work *miracles*, if he should think proper so to do. But then I say this would be a proper miracle, such as, at this day, we are not authorized to expect. And judging by what we see actually to take place, and what we must conclude to be just and right, God *may*, and probably *will*, leave such a one to himself. He may determine to try him no longer by any of those methods of his providence which are usually employed for the purpose of reclaiming sinners.

For instance, afflictions, and especially bodily sickness, are a great means of softening and bettering the minds of men: but God may resolve that he shall be visited with no remarkable sickness, till he be overtaken with his last; or he may cut him off by a sudden and unexpected death, in the midst of his crimes. The death of our friends, or any calamities befalling them, have often been the means, in the hands of Divine Providence, of bringing to serious thought and reflection those who have survived those strokes; but God may resolve never to touch him in so tender a part, but rather make use of his death as a warning and example to others.

Now, when a man is thus *left of God*, and no providential methods are used to reclaim him, we may conclude that he is irrecoverably lost. It is in fact, and according to the course of nature (and we know of no deviations from it since the age of the apostles),

absolutely impossible that he should repent, or be reformed. And though he should continue to live ever so long after God has thus forsaken him, he is only, in the awful language of scripture, "treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath; and there remains nothing for him but a fearful looking for of judgment, and of that fiery indignation which shall consume the adversaries of God."

Having thus stated the nature of this awful case, and shewn in what sense, and on what account, it may be said that it is quite desperate and hopeless, viz. because it may be morally impossible that he should ever truly repent and be reformed, by reason of God's withdrawing those providential methods by which he uses to work upon men's hearts, and to bring them to serious thought and reflection, I come

2dly, To consider the *probability* and *danger* of the case with respect to human nature; how far men are liable to fall into this fearful condition, and by what means they fall into it.

A man's case may be pronounced to be thus desperate, when his mind is brought into such a state as that the neeessary means of reformation shall have lost their effect upon him; and this is the natural consequence of confirmed habits of vice, and a long-continued neglect of the means of religion and virtue; which is so far from being an impossible or improbable case, that it is a very general one.

In order to be the more sensible of this, you are to

consider that vice is a *habit*, and therefore of a subtle and insinuating nature. By easy, pleasing, and seemingly harmless actions, men are often betrayed into a *progress*, which grows every day more alarming. Our virtuous resolutions may break with difficulty. It may be with pain and reluctance that we commit the *first acts* of sin, but the *next* are easier to us; and use, custom, and habit, will at last reconcile us to any thing, even things the very idea of which might at first be shocking to us.

Vice is a thing not to be trifled with. You may, by the force of vigorous resolution, break off in the early stages of it; but *habits*, when they have been confirmed, and long continued, are obstinate things to contend with, and are hardly ever entirely subdued. When bad habits *seem* to be overcome, and we think we have got rid of our chains, they may perhaps only have become, as it were *invisible;* so that when we thought we had recovered our freedom, and strength, so as to be able to repel any temptation, we may lose all power of resistance on the first approach of it.

A man who has contracted a habit of vice, and been abandoned to sinful courses for some time, is never out of danger. He is exactly in the case of a man who has long laboured under a chronical disease, and is perpetually subject to a relapse. The first shock of any disorder a man's constitution may bear, and, if he be not naturally subject to it, he may per-

fectly recover, and be out of danger. But when the general habit is such, as that a *relapse* is apprehended, a man's friends and physicians are alarmed for him.

The reason is, that a relapse does not find a person in the condition in which he was when the first fit of illness seized him. That gave his constitution a shock, and left him enfeebled, so as to be less able to sustain another shock; and especially if it be more violent than the former, as is generally the case in those disorders.

In the very same dangerous situation is the man who has ever been addicted to vicious courses. He can never be said to be *perfectly recovered*, whatever appearances may promise, but is always in danger of a fatal relapse. He ought, therefore, to take the greatest care of himself. He is not in the condition of a person who has *never known the ways of wickedness*. He ought, therefore, to have the greatest distrust of himself, and set a double watch over his thoughts, words, and actions, for fear of a surprise. For if once, through the force of any particular temptation, he should fall back into his former vicious courses, and his former disposition should return, his case will probably be desperate. He will plunge himself still deeper in wickedness; and his having abstained for a time will only, as it were, have whetted his appetite, and make him swallow down the poison of sin by larger and more eager draughts than ever.

Such persons may be so entirely in the power of

vicious habits, that they shall be in no sense *their own masters.* They may even see the danger they are in, wish to free themselves from the habits they have contracted, and yet find they have no force, or resolution, to relieve themselves. They are not to be rescued from *the snare of the destroyer*, and brought to their *right mind*, but by some uncommon and alarming providence, which is in the hands of God, and which he may justly withhold when his patience and long suffering have been much abused. Justly may he say to such an habitual sinner, as he did to Ephraim in my text; "He is joined to idols," he is joined to his lusts, "let him alone." He is determined to have the *pleasure of sin*, let him receive the *wages of sin* also.

This brings me to the third head of my discourse, in which I propose to consider the equity of the proceeding with respect to God.

It may be said that it is not agreeable to equity for God to favour some with the means of improvement, and suffer others to abandon themselves to destruction without a possibility of escaping. But I answer that the persons whose case I have been describing have had, and have outlived, their *day of grace.* God has long exercised forbearance towards them, but they have wearied it out; and it could not be expected to last for ever. They have had gracious invitations to repentance, but they have slighted them all: they *stopped their ears* and *refused to return.* They have been tried with a great variety both of merciful and

of afflictive providences, but they make no good use of them. "Why then," as the prophet says, "should they be stricken any more, when they will only revolt more and more?"

A day of trial and probation, or what is frequently called a *day of grace*, must necessarily have some period; else, when would the time of retribution, when would the time of rewards and punishments, take place? A state of trial necessarily respects some future state, in which men must receive according to their deeds. But this state of trial it has pleased God to make of uncertain duration, no doubt to keep us always watchful, having our accounts always in readiness, because *in such an hour as we think not our Lord may come*, and require them. The state of trial, therefore, is with some of much longer duration than it is with others; and God is the sovereign arbiter of every thing relating to it. He makes our lives longer or shorter, as seems good in his sight, and at death a state of trial ends of course. We may, therefore, as well pretend to question the justice and equity of God's cutting us off by death when and in what manner he pleases, as arraign his justice in sealing up our doom, though while we live, whenever he pleases.

No doubt God gives to every person a sufficient trial; for *he is not willing that any should perish*, but *had rather that all should come to repentance*. We may therefore assure ourselves, that he will not cease to endeavour to promote the reformation of

a sinner by all proper means, till he shall become absolutely incorrigible, and the methods taken to reclaim him would be abused and lost. And if we consider that every means of improvement neglected adds to a man's guilt, and aggravates his condemnation, it may even appear to be mercy in the Divine Being to grant a person no further means of improvement, after it has been found, by actual trial, that they would only have been abused, and therefore have proved highly injurious to him. Not but that it might have been sufficient to silence every cavil of this kind, to say, as Paul does on a similar occasion, "Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?" or with Abraham "Shall not the judge of all the earth do that which is right?" But it is proper to show that "in the midst of judgment God remembers mercy."

There is a very pathetic description of the case of a sinner, who, after a relapse into vicious courses, is justly abandoned of God, to seek his own destruction, in a parable of our Saviour's, formed upon the popular opinion of the Jews of his age concerning demons or evil spirits, Matt. xii. 43, &c "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return to my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter

in, and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first." The application of this parable either to the case of the Jews (for whom it seems to have been originally intended) or to particular persons, who after a seeming reformation have relapsed into vicious courses, is too obvious to be particularly dwelt upon.

To come, therefore, to a general application of this doctrine; let all persons who are sensible of the folly and evil of sinful courses, and of the danger of persisting in them, make a speedy and effectual retreat. Let us do nothing by halves. To be lukewarm in religion, is in effect to have no religion at all. We must "give God our hearts;" we must give him an undivided affection; for "we cannot truly love God and Mammon," or the world, at the same time. In this unsettled and fluctuating disposition, temptations will have a great advantage over us. We shall ever be in danger of throwing off all restraint, and of running into every kind of riot and excess, till nothing on the part of Divine Providence shall occur to reclaim us.

In reality, my brethren, and to every valuable end and purpose, the term of our trial and probation does generally expire long before the term of our natural lives. For, how few are there whose *characters*, whose *dispositions*, or *habits of mind*, undergo any considerable change after they are grown to man's estate! Our *tempers* and general characters are

usually fixed as soon as we have fixed ourselves in a regular employment and mode of life. For, after this, we see almost every person continue the very same to the end of his life. Some remarkable providential occurrence, some fit of sickness, or some unforeseen misfortune of any kind, may alarm those who have been addicted to vicious courses, and for a time bring them to serious thought and reflection; but if they be turned thirty or forty years of age, how soon do the serious purposes, which they then form, go off, and their former modes of thinking and living return! Not only with respect to *temper* and *disposition of mind*, as it relates to virtue or vice, but with respect to those habits which are indifferent to morals, we see that, excepting one case perhaps in a thousand, they are not subject to change after the period that I have mentioned. Any habits that we contract early in life, any particular bias or inclination; any particular cast of thought, or mode of conversation; even any particular gesture of body, as in walking, sitting, &c. we are universally known by among our acquaintance, from the time that we properly *enter life* to the time that we have done with it; as much as we are by the tone of our voice, or our hand-writing, which likewise are of the nature of *habits*, or *customs*.

These observations may be applied in a great measure, even to matters of *opinion*, (though, naturally, nothing seems to be more variable) as well

as to mental and corporeal *habits*. A man who has studied, or who fancies he has studied, any particular subject, sooner or later *makes up his mind*, as we say, with respect to it; and after this, all arguments, intended to convince him of his mistake, only serve to confirm him in his chosen way of thinking. An argument or evidence of any kind, that is entirely *new* to a man, may make a proper impression upon him; but if it has been often proposed to him, and he has had time to view and consider it, so as to have hit upon any method of evading the force of it, he is afterwards quite callous to it, and can very seldom be prevailed upon to give it any proper attention. This consideration accounts, in some measure, both for the great influence of christianity on its first publication, when the doctrines were *new* and *striking*, and also for the absolute indifference with which the same great truths are now heard in all christian countries.

It accounts also for the more striking effect of the preaching of the methodists than ours. They find people utterly ignorant, to whom the truths, the promises, and the threatenings, of the gospel are really *new*; whereas we have to do with persons who have heard them from their infancy, and have, alas, acquired a habit of disregarding them. But then our people, having, in general, been brought up in habits of virtue, such great changes of character and conduct are less necessary in their case. It is to be regretted, however, that they too seldom exceed that

mediocrity of character which they acquire in early life. I speak of the generality among us. For others are remarkable exceptions, persons of *disinterested and heroic virtue*, in full proportion to the superior advantages which they enjoy.

The resistance which the mind makes to the admission of truth, when it has been strongly prejudiced against it, is evident both with respect to the belief of christianity in general, and of particular opinions relating to it. There are many persons, by no means defective with respect to *judgment* in other things, of whose conversion to christianity we can have no more reasonable expectation than of the sun rising in the west, even though they should consent to hear, or read, every thing that we could propose to them for that purpose. There are also many conscientious and intelligent Roman-Catholics, absurd as we justly think their principles to be, who would deliberately read the best defences of protestantism, without any other effect than that of being more confirmed in their prejudices against it. The same may be said of persons professing other modes of faith; so that their persuasions are not to be changed, except by such a method as that which was applied for the conversion of the apostle Paul. The same observation may also be applied to many opinions, and especially to a *general bias*, or *turn of thinking*, in matters of a political nature, and even in subjects of philosophy, or criticism.

Facts of this kind, of which we are all witnesses,

and which come within the observation of every day in our lives, show, in a very striking light, what care we ought to take in forming our *first judgments* of things, and in contracting our *first habits*, and therefore deserve the more especial attention of *young persons*. For we see that when these *principles* and *habits* are once properly formed they, are generally fixed for life. Whatever is fact with respect to *mankind in general*, we ought to conclude to be the case with respect to *ourselves*; that the cause is in the constitution of our *common nature*, and dependant upon the fundamental laws of it, and no doubt, a wise and useful part of it; and we must not expect that *miracles* will be wrought in our favour.

To show that there is the greatest advantage ,as well as some inconvenience, resulting from this *disposition to fixity*, as we call it, in our own nature, let it be observed, that if there was nothing *fixed* or *permanent* in the *human character*, we should find the same inconvenience as if any other law of nature was unsettled. We should be perpetually at a loss how to conduct ourselves, how to behave to mankind in general, and even to our own particular friends and acquaintance, especially after having been for any space of time absent from them. We do not expect to find persons the very same in all changes of condition or circumstances, as in sickness and health, prosperity and adversity, &c. but

then we generally know what *kind of change* to expect in them in those circumstances, and we regulate our conduct towards them by our experience of the usual effect of similar changes.

These observations, when applied to *opinions* may serve to amuse us, but when they are applied to *practice* they ought seriously to alarm us. Let all those, therefore, who, being at all advanced in life, see reason to be dissatisfied with themselves, with their disposition of mind, and their general conduct, be alarmed; for there is certainly the greatest reason for it, probably much more than they are themselves aware of. Persons in this state of mind always flatter themselves with a time when they shall have more leisure for repentance and reformation; but, judging from observation on others, which is the surest guide that they can follow (infinitely better than their own imaginations), they may conclude, that it is almost a certainty that such a time will never come.

If they should have the leisure for repentance and reformation which they promised themselves, it is not probable that sufficient strength of resolution will come along with it. Indeed, all resolutions to repent at a future time are necessarily insincere, and must be a mere deception; because they imply a preference of a man's present habits and conduct that he is really unwilling to change them, and that nothing but necessity would lead him to make any attempt of the

kind. In fact, he can only mean that he will discontinue particular actions; his habits, or temper of mind, remaining the same.

Besides, a real, effectual repentance, or reformation, is such a total change in a man, as cannot, in the nature of things, take place in a short space of time. A man's habits are formed by the scenes he has gone through, and the impressions which they have made upon him; and when death approaches, a man has not another life, like this, to live over again. He may, even on a death-bed, most sincerely *wish* that he had a pious and benevolent disposition, with the love of virtue in all its branches: but that *wish*, though it be ever so sincere and earnest, can no more produce a proper change in his mind, than it can restore him to health, or make him taller, or stronger, than he is.

The precise time when this confirmed state of mind takes place, or, in the language of scripture, the time when any person is thus "left of God," or "left to himself," cannot be determined. It is necessarily various and uncertain. But, in general, we may say, that when any person has been long abandoned to vicious courses, when vice is grown into a habit with him, and especially when his vices are more properly of a mental nature, such as a disposition to envy, malice, or selfishness, (which are the most inveterate, the most difficult to be eradicated, of all vices); when neither health nor

sickness, prosperity nor adversity; when neither a man's own reflections, the remonstrances of his friends, nor admonitions from the pulpit, have any visible effect upon him; when, after this we see no great change in his worldly affairs, or connections, but he goes on from day to day, from month to month, and from year to year, without any sensible alteration, there is reason to fear that he is fallen into this fatal security, that he is, as it were, "fallen asleep," and that this sleep will be "the sleep of death."

However, a shadow of hope is not to be despised. One chance in a thousand is still a chance; and there are persons whose vigour of mind is such, that, when sufficiently roused, they are equal to almost any thing. Let those, therefore, who see their danger at any time of life, be "up and doing, working out their salvation with fear and trembling, that," if possible, "they may flee from the wrath to come."

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could say, " Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto,"*—is it possible for us to contemplate our fellow-immortals in the most important of all views of their condition, relations, and prospects, without any rising questions of anxious curiosity?—And as each subject has its appropriate, both have also their common interest. They both involve the principles of the Divine administration, as displayed under varying circumstances;—and both have thus a powerful claim on the attentive regard of PIETY, which cannot but be desirous to ascertain these principles with precision, to have a clear discernment and a devout impression of their rectitude, and thus to possess satisfactory ground on which to " vindicate the ways of God to men," and to clear the revelation he has given us of every evil surmise and derogatory imputation.—Upon this new topic I have endeavoured to bring the light of scripture to bear, and to show that the intimations of the Sacred Volume concerning it are in harmony with the dictates of enlightened reason. With what measure of success, it is not mine to decide.

I would willingly have followed advice, and have altered the form of the work, converting it into a TREATISE on responsibility in general. I am sensible this might, in some respects, have been an improvement. The instant I looked at the subject, however, in this general light, the field widened before me, to an extent that made me shrink; and I perceived that, to do it justice, it would require to embrace a variety of topics, on which, however attractive, I was not desirous, in the meantime at least, of appearing before the public.

I have very recently seen the advertisement and reviews of an Essay on the " Final State of the Heathen," by my esteemed friend the Rev. John Burder. But not having yet obtained the work itself, I am sorry I have

* " I am a man,—whatever concerns man concerns me."

not had it in my power to avail myself of a comparison of its views and reasonings with those which have presented themselves to my own mind.—I shall be glad if our sentiments shall be found coincident, and have no apprehension of any material discrepance.

I have subjoined, in an Appendix, some strictures on an article in the Westminster Review;—an article which, as well as some other anonymous comments on the principles of the two former Sermons, has served, instead of invalidating, to give additional stability to those principles.

RALPH WARDLAW.

Glasgow, *March* 22*d*, 1827.

TO THE

Rev. STEVENSON MACGILL, D. D.

PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW.

Rev. and Dear Sir,

Having formerly committed to your patronage the two Sermons on Man's Accountableness for his Belief, I am induced, by the same sentiments of unabated esteem which I then expressed, to present them to you anew, with the improvements of a Second Edition ;—and along with them, other two, on a subject of kindred nature, of deep interest, and of somewhat delicate discussion. Whether I have at all succeeded in placing it in a scriptural and satisfactory light, it must lie with you and others to determine.

Allow me again to assure you of the same fervent wishes as before, for the prolongation of your life, the maintenance of your unblemished reputation, and the success of your official labours,—and believe me still to be,

Rev. and Dear Sir,

Yours, with affectionate regard,

RALPH WARDLAW.

Glasgow, *March 22d*, 1827.

PREFACE

TO THE FIRST EDITION.

The following Sermons (to use the good old-fashioned title of pulpit addresses) were delivered on the first Lord's Day evenings of the two months immediately following the publication of Mr. Brougham's Inaugural Discourse; these monthly occasions having been preferred, as affording, for a subject to which this circumstance had drawn the public attention, a more numerous and more promiscuous auditory than the ordinary meetings of every Sabbath.

In prefaces to such Discourses, it is common for authors to assure their readers, that they were delivered without any view to their subsequent publication:—and for this assurance, they sometimes obtain *less* credit than it is entitled to, and possibly sometimes *more*. In the present instance, were an *affidavit* to this effect worth making at all, it might be made in *bona fide* sincerity; and with equal truth it might be added, that my assent to the repeated request to publish was given with considerable hesitation.—Amongst other reasons for this, one, and not the least, was, a dread of the imputation of vanity, in presenting myself before the public as an antagonist to a man of such distinguished eminence. My imagination has fancied what might be said; and I have sensitively shrunk from the fancy, and almost resolved upon suppression. It is possible, I am aware, that

this sensitiveness may itself be one form of the very principle of which it dreads the surmise. It may be allied to that description of modesty which Cowper represents as lurking

> "Conceal'd within an unsuspected part,
> The vainest corner of our own vain heart."

—Should any of my readers be *charitably* disposed to trace it to this lurking-place, I shall only say, that I *hope* they are mistaken.

The subject of these Discourses pertains to a department of knowledge, in which, perhaps, without a breach of charity, it may be feared, the mind of Mr. Brougham, with all the energy, and riches, and versatility of its highly cultivated powers, (of which his Inaugural Address is itself so fine a specimen) has been more a stranger than in most others; and if his decisions in this department be hasty and erroneous, the very celebrity which he has attained, and the extent of influence thence arising only render the necessity the more urgent, and the duty the more imperative, of attempting their exposure. The subject itself is one on which correct conceptions are of the very highest moment,—connected as it is with incomparably the most interesting of all the prospects that lie before us;—the account, namely, which we have every one of us to render to our Supreme Ruler and righteous Judge. The position which I have undertaken to question has been advanced with all publicity; it has been, in a manner, assumed as a fundamental axiom, and no ordinary stress has been laid upon it; and the application of it has been carried out to a very bold and startling length.—By such considerations, connected with the fact, that no one else, so far as I know, has intimated any intention of taking up, at least from the press, the defence of what I cannot but deem important truth,—I have been induced to lay my sentiments before the public. If any,

agreeing with me in the substance of these sentiments, shall yet be disposed to say—" Non tali auxilio"—I must console myself with the consciousness of having " done what I could."

In mentioning the publicity with which the position here combated has been advanced, and the extreme length to which the application of it has been carried, I do not refer merely to the time when the Inaugural Discourse was delivered, but to a subsequent occasion, in a still higher quarter. The following is an extract of Mr. Brougham's speech in the House of Commons, on presenting a petition from Mr. Richard Carlile, as reported in the *Morning Chronicle* newspaper of July 1, with the comments of the Editor:—

" It was no offence against the Law to entertain any set of opinions, either upon religious or political subjects; neither was it " any to discuss them, provided they were discussed with decency " and propriety. If a man was an Atheist or an Infidel, it was his " misfortune, not his fault; but if he indecently and improperly " published those opinions, then he was amenable to the laws of " his country. He should look upon an Atheist or an Infidel, if " there were any such, with pity, not with blame; and he should " consider him to be a rash man who would undertake to punish " the free discussion of such subjects, provided that discussion was " conducted with decency, as he considered that such discussion, instead of being injurious, would be beneficial to religion."

" Mr. Brougham did himself great honour," says the Editor, " by the eloquent and manly manner in which, on presenting a " petition from Richard Carlile, he reprobated the sentence under " which that individual had so long suffered."

" His arguments were a very apposite commentary on the beautiful passage in his Inaugural Discourse, at Glasgow, printed at " the request of the Principal, Professors, and Students, of that " University, and therefore adopted by that learned and highly respectable body:—' The great truth has finally gone forth to all " the ends of the earth, That man shall no more render account to " man for his belief, over which he himself has no control. Hence" forward nothing shall prevail upon us to praise or to blame any " one for that which he can no more change than he can the hue " of his skin, or the height of his stature.' It is the more meritorious in Mr. Brougham, and the University of Glasgow, to

" adopt so liberal a principle, that the nation in general, is, we be-
" lieve, far from being ripe for it."

What the Editor of the *Morning Chronicle* here says about the sentiment in question having been adopted and sanctioned by the " learned and highly respectable body" of the University of Glasgow, is exceedingly foolish, and undeserving of any serious comment: nor is it for me to say, how far the eulogium bestowed upon that body on such a ground would be received with complacency by its members.—What I wish the reader to mark is, the length to which the application of the sentiment is carried,—and carried with this Editor's unmeasured applause. I am a decided friend to that freedom of discussion for which Mr. Brougham contends, and am as fearless as he can be about its ultimate results to the cause of truth. I am a decided friend too to liberality of sentiment, and to charitable judgment of character. But that infidelity,—and not infidelity only, but even atheism itself, is to be regarded by us as a man's *misfortune* and *not his fault*, is, in my mind, a licentious extension of charity beyond all scriptural and all reasonable bounds. That an atheist is to be *pitied*, I grant. There is not, amongst all on earth that can claim compassion, a more truly pitiable being. O the dreary wretchedness of that soul, if such a soul there be, that has quenched to itself the light of creation, and divested the universe of a presiding and pervading Deity! But amongst the grounds of my pity, I must be permitted to include the state of the man's *heart*, as well as of his *understanding*. A blameless atheist—an atheist that has arrived at his miserable conclusions without the perverting influence of *moral pravity*, under one or more of its various modifications,—is a character, I honestly confess, of which I am unable to form the conception. To define with unexceptionable precision, the boundaries of charity, is a task, for the

delicacy and difficulty of which I pretend not to be competent. But boundaries it surely has. And I cannot think that I am chargeable with unwarrantably circumscribing these, when I refuse the claim of unbiassed candour of judgment, or of unimpeachable soundness of moral principle, to the man who DENIES A GOD!—In the Discourses it is my endeavour to show, that in the scriptures the claim I have just mentioned is refused to *all infidelity* of their peculiar discoveries, and to illustrate the principles, on which, as I conceive, this refusal may be justly vindicated. I hope I shall not be found, on a subject as delicate as it is momentous, to have "spoken wickedly for God," or to have "darkened counsel by words without knowledge."

R. W.

PREFACE

TO THE SECOND EDITION, AND TO THE ADDITIONAL SERMONS.

THE favourable reception of the two Sermons on Man's Responsibility for his Belief, indicated by the somewhat rapid disposal of a large impression, was owing, I am well aware, in no small degree, to the peculiar circumstances which had given rise to their publication, and the consequent excitement of a pretty general curiosity. The name of BROUGHAM, I doubt not, might sell more copies than that of the Author. Some portion of the effect, at the same time, must be imputed to the intrinsically interesting nature of the subject itself;—the grounds of our accountableness to the Supreme Author of our existence, being matters of the weightiest concern to every thoughtful mind.—In regard to the *execution* of a work,—the manner in which its subjects have been treated,—the reception of a second Edition is, perhaps, in such circumstances, a fairer criterion of public opinion than that of a first.

I have been induced to accompany the two former Discourses with two additional ones, on a subject very nearly allied to that of which they treat,—almost, indeed, forming a branch of it,—namely, the RESPONSIBILITY OF THE HEATHEN. If the former subject be interesting to the solicitudes of SELF-LOVE,—the latter is not less so to those of PHILANTHROPY. If a Heathen

SERMON I.

JOHN iii. 18, 19.

" He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

I KNOW not why I should conceal, what has led me to the choice of the subject which I have just announced.—When names of distinguished eminence are found giving their public sanction to sentiments, of which the truth is more than doubtful, and yet the falsity plausible;—sentiments, which, wherever they are admitted without their necessary qualifications, tend to consequences injurious to the best interests of mankind; and when these sentiments, moreover, are arrayed in the charms of a captivating eloquence, and are presented with the tone of confident triumph, with the emphasis and solemnity of oracular wisdom, and what is still more imposing, with the zealous warmth of real though mistaken philanthropy:—it cannot surely be deemed by any a departure from the proper province of a teacher and guardian of divine truth, to bear his testimony, with equal publicity, against

them, and to lift the voice, however comparatively feeble, of honest and faithful warning.

It is but a few weeks, since the following sentences, with every accompaniment that could contribute to recommend the leading sentiment which they contain to inconsiderate applause, and to too unqualified adoption, were delivered, in presence of a number of our fellow-citizens, to the senate and youth of our university:—"As "men will no longer suffer themselves to be led blind-"fold in ignorance, so will they no more yield to the "vile principle of judging and treating their fellow-crea-"tures, not according to the intrinsic merit of their actions, "but according to the incidental and involuntary coinci-"dence of their opinions. The great truth has finally gone "forth to all the ends of the earth, THAT MAN SHALL "NO MORE RENDER ACCOUNT TO MAN FOR HIS BELIEF, "OVER WHICH HE HAS HIMSELF NO CONTROL. Hence-"forward, nothing shall prevail upon us to praise or to "blame any one for that which he can no more change "than he can the hue of his skin, or the height of his "stature." *

To these sentences a still greater publicity and permanence have since been given by the press; and their leading position, emblazoned in capitals, is held forth to the grateful and admiring acceptance of the whole world.—That they contain *no truth*, it would be uncandid and scandalous to affirm. They *do* contain truth; and truth too of the highest practical utility.—It is a truth, that men *ought* no longer to be led, and it would be a joyful truth, if a truth it were, that they *are resolved* no longer to be led, blindfold in ignorance.—It is a truth, that the

* Inaug. Disc. p. 47.

principle which leads men to judge and treat each other, not according to the intrinsic merit of their actions, but according to the accidental and involuntary coincidence of their opinions, *is* a vile principle;—although room might obviously enough be found here for certain questions of casuistry, about what it is that constitutes the intrinsic merit of actions; whether it lies in the *actions themselves*, or in the *principles* in the mind of the agent from which they proceed:—for in the latter case, the spirit of the sentiment, however true, might not be so easily reducible to practice.—It is a truth, that man should not render account to man for his belief:—and, in as far as this is meant to express the grand principle of *universal toleration*, there is no length to which I would not cheerfully go along with its eloquent and powerful advocate: the very word *toleration*, (seeing a right to tolerate supposes the existence of a corresponding right to restrain and to coerce) being a term, which, in such an application of it, no language ought to retain. Men should be as free to think, as they are free to breathe. I make no exceptions. Let truth defend herself; and defend herself by her own legitimate means. She is well able to do so; nor does she stand in need of any auxiliary methods, beyond those of fair argument, and rational persuasion. Give her an open field, and the free use of her weapons, and she will stand her ground. Legal restraint and suppression have invariably had the effect of giving tenfold prevalence to the dreaded error; and measures of coercion, whilst they have made hypocrites by thousands, have never made, and never can make, one genuine convert to her cause.

Most heartily also do I concur with the eloquent orator in the full spirit of what he represents as the practical use

of his principle, in regulating the reciprocal conduct of men, in the intercourse of social life:—"Henceforward, "treating with entire respect those who conscientiously "differ from ourselves, the only practical effect of the "difference will be, to make us enlighten the ignorance, "on one side or the other, from which it springs,—by "instructing *them*, if it be theirs,—*ourselves*, if it be our "own; to the end, that the only kind of unanimity may "be produced, which is desirable among rational beings, "—the agreement proceeding from full conviction after "the freest discussion." *

But there is what I conceive to be an error of no trivial magnitude, *lurking* (shall I say?) amidst these salutary truths. No: it does not lurk. Whether an error or not, it is not concealed. It is palpable, avowed, prominent: and the very accompaniments of truth with which it is attended, serve to render it the more insinuating and dangerous. As persecution for conscience' sake is the subject of the entire passage in which the offensive sentences stand, we are warranted in conceiving that it is to *religious* opinions and belief that the speaker more especially, perhaps I might say exclusively, refers. Now the matter, as it appears to me, stands thus. If it be indeed true, as is here, without qualification, assumed and asserted, that "coincidences and diversities of opinion are altogether accidental and involuntary,"—that "over his belief a man has no control," any more than he has over "the hue of his skin, or the height of his stature,"—and that *for* his belief, whatever it may be, a man is no more the proper subject of praise or of blame, than he is for a light or a dark complexion, or for the dimensions of his corporeal

* Inaug. Disc. p. 48.

frame:—if, I say, these things be so, then it follows,—not merely that man should not account TO MAN for his belief,—but also, and with equal certainty, that man has no account to render for his belief TO GOD. There is no moral responsibility connected with it. We never think of associating any such responsibility with colour, or with stature; and if the two cases be really parallel, neither should we, in any circumstances, associate it with opinions or belief.

Now it is precisely here, that we conceive the mischievous error to lye. We dare not hesitate to say, that between this sentiment and the most explicit statements and uniform assumptions of the Bible, there is a perfect contrariety. Our orator and the inspired penmen are quite at issue. It is impossible for any one to receive the doctrine now promulgated by the former, as the "great "truth that has" at length happily "gone forth to all the "ends of the earth," without renouncing the authority of the latter, whose commission was to proclaim "to all the ends of the earth" a message of a far different tenor. When the apostles announced their testimony, in the name of the God of truth, they knew nothing of that philosophy which would now release men from the obligation to give it a believing reception, and exculpate them from all guilt in the refusal of it. When they "went into all the world, and preached the gospel to every creature," they subjoined the authoritative assurance, "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be condemned." According to *their* declarations, the difference between faith and unbelief was of no trivial import. It was all the difference between safety and destruction, between the blessing and the curse of God, between heaven and hell. We do not find them saying to their hearers,—"We are

aware that you have no control over your belief; that it is a thing altogether involuntary; that your believing or not believing what we testify can therefore have no influence whatsoever upon your prospects of retribution as accountable creatures,—for it is as unconnected with your will, as is the hue of your skin or the height of your stature. We *recommend* our testimony to you, knowing it to be from God, and persuaded of its beneficial tendency: —but, if the evidence we set before you of its truth does not produce conviction in your minds, we are far from meaning to insinuate that on this account it will fare at all the worse with you in the end."—They proceeded, as you all know, on no such principles; they presented their commission with no such pliable and conscience-soothing explanations;—but, in direct and unqualified terms, connected *salvation* with the *acceptance* of their message, and *perdition* with its *refusal.*

That this was the simple matter of fact, I may by and by show a little more fully from the inspired record; although, indeed, to no one who has even the most superficial acquaintance with that record ought any such detail of proof to be necessary.—But before proceeding further with the scripture argument, I may be allowed to observe, that the principle so unqualifiedly laid down is as inconsistent with the true philosophy of the human mind, and with the numberless and obvious facts of every-day experience, as it is with the dictates and implications of holy writ.—Is there, I would ask, no reciprocally influential connection between the understanding and the affections? and more especially, has the state of the latter no influence upon the exercise of the former? Who that knows any thing of even the most ordinary phenomena of human nature,—phenomena which, so far from being

recondite, are open to every one's observation,—is not aware how mighty is the power of the desires and inclinations over the operations of intellect?—to what a vast extent, both in the number of instances and in the degree of force, opinion and belief are affected by predisposition,—by the previous bent of the will? The thing is notorious—proverbially notorious;—the blindness produced by the *want of will to see*, being pronounced by proverb, which embodies the authority of experience, to be of all descriptions of blindness the most inveterate and hopeless. I speak, of course, of human nature, according to the appearances which it *now* presents. The question is not, whether what I now describe be a regular and healthy, or a disordered and morbid exercise of its powers and functions,—but simply, whether the fact be or be not as I have stated it:—not what was originally the case,—or even, whether the case ever was otherwise,—but what is actually the case *now*? And as to this, it is impossible to hesitate.

I do not, for my own part, entertain a doubt, but that at the very moment when the sentiment under consideration was publicly uttered, there was a practical exemplification furnished of the truth of the remark just made concerning it,—an experimental refutation of its principle. —At the time of its being delivered, it was generally and loudly applauded. There might possibly be not a few, especially of the junior part of the auditory, who swelled the noisy acclamation, as they are ever ready to do, without well knowing why:—there might be some, too, who gave it their instant and hearty sanction, because of the decided reprobation which it involved of all religious intolerance, without adverting, in the moment of excited enthusiasm, to its other bearings. But the question I

would now ask, is, Was there, in the mind of no one present, an existing predisposition to receive it? Were there none, with whom it was likely beforehand to prove a favourite sentiment,—a sentiment which they would be eager to catch at, and fond to retain? Was there no thoughtless man of the world there,—was there no inconsiderate sceptic there,—was there no youth there of loose morals or of undetermined virtue,—who felt inwardly pleased with the sentiment, as one on which his mind could repose, in an easy and self-complacent quietude? Was there there, I would even ask, no political partisan, who, by his admiring predilection for the views and conduct of the statesman, was prepared to accept, with a too undiscriminating confidence, the maxims of the moralist? Were there none, in a word, (whatsoever might be the inward spring from which the feeling arose) who were gratified with the idea, that they might think and believe even as it chanced to them, without being responsible,—without incurring, for their opinions or their faith, any charge of moral delinquency, more than for the stature or the complexion which nature or circumstances might happen to have given them?—If in a single bosom present there existed such a predisposition,—a readiness to catch at what was uttered, and to be easily persuaded of its truth,—a wish, however secret, that it might be as the speaker represented it:—then there was in that bosom a refutation of the sentiment;—for there was one instance at least (and if one, there might be many) of the understanding being influenced by the heart,—of the opinions and belief being modified by the inclinations.

Who, indeed, is there, who has not had the experience, how comparatively easy a task it is to convince a man by argument, when inclination has been first gained over;—

and how hard and hopeless the attempt to satisfy him, when the will is in opposition?—how light the assault required to storm the citadel of the understanding, when the affections and desires have once capitulated; and how desperate the resistance, how determined and pertinacious the holding-out, when the heart is hostile to the offered proposals, or to the grounds, however just and unexceptionable, on which they are presented?—"Why do ye not understand my speech?" said Jesus to the Jews—"even because ye cannot hear" (that is, ye cannot *bear*) "my words."—No where, indeed, are illustrations to be found of the truth of the remarks I am now making, more striking and more humbling, than in our Saviour's intercourse with his unbelieving countrymen, during his public ministry. That he was the Christ, was attested by proofs without number, of which every one was by itself conclusive. But all their deeply rooted prejudices, all their fondly cherished expectations, all their eager wishes and desires (the wishes and desires of an unrenewed and worldly spirit) were against the admission of this truth. The consequence was, that to the force of evidence, though clear as the light of the meridian sun, they continued obstinately blind. Every additional proof served only to rouse up their enmity, and inflame their rage; producing and maintaining that state of mind, a more intolerable than which it is not easy to imagine, where there is war between the heart and judgment;—where there is hatred of the truth in the former, and a powerful witness to it in the latter, and a consequent agonizing conflict between aversion on the one part, and secret, unacknowledged, resisted conviction on the other; where, in a word, the man is "divided against himself." Evidence, in these circumstances, cannot be endured.

Every attempt is made to refute and to discredit it; and when such attempts fail, violence, both of words and conduct, is brought to the aid of deficient and baffled argument.—The account of the blind man, in the ninth chapter of the gospel by John, presents a highly interesting and instructive exemplification of this unhappy state of mind. The Pharisees first of all do what they can to disparage the character of Jesus, and to fix upon it, in the public mind, the stigma of impiety:—their next endeavours are, to discredit and disprove the miracle,—an increasing irritability evincing itself as the examination of the case proceeds, and as it gradually opens in a manner so contrary to their wishes:—till at length, being fully confronted by the poor beggar himself, with all the simplicity and force of truth, opposed to the inconsistency and chicanery of error; they feel their ground untenable; they can stand it no longer; they cease to argue, though they do not yield to conviction; defeated in argument, they have recourse to power; they assume the portly attitude of incensed superiority; they revile, and scold, and thunder the anathemas of excommunication against their innocent and helpless victim.

Now, we must lay it down as a position which will not admit of controversy, that in as far as *opinions* are thus influenced by *disposition*,—*belief* by *inclination*,—the *decisions of the understanding* by the *state of the heart*,—they are fair and legitimate subjects of *moral responsibility*.—There is, in this view of the matter, no absurdity in affirming, that moral evil may attach to an opinion,—virtue or vice to belief or unbelief,—and a just imputation of sin to an intellectual decision. I hesitate not to say, that even in the ordinary every-day concerns of life, this influence of the heart upon the

understanding, of inclination upon opinion and belief, has place, though in greater and less degrees, in an immense preponderance of instances; in not a few of them, I readily grant, (in consequence of our natural unwillingness to believe it, which is another modification of the very same tendency) with hardly any perception or consciousness of it on the part of him by whom it is exemplified.—And on the subject of *religion*, to which alone our present inquiry relates, the authority of scripture unites with observation and experience in convincing me, that there is *no exception;* that the moral influence of which I speak is universal; none being exempt from it, although the degrees may be various of its natural and acquired force. I dare not qualify this statement. Believing the divine testimony,—the testimony of unerring omniscience, which, to every unprejudiced observer, must appear in full accordance with facts,—respecting the natural ungodliness of the human heart,—its tendencies to forget the Most High, to "depart from the fountain of living water, and to hew out for itself broken cisterns that can hold no water,"—its love of sin and aversion to holiness,—its froward self-will and impatience of the restraints of authority,—its fondness for all that gratifies its pride, and its disrelish of all that is humbling,—believing this verdict on the character of human nature, I cannot but hold the conviction, that in the bosom of every son and daughter of Adam there exists a predisposition against the gospel,—against the truth of God, and the God of truth,—against the Lord, and against his Christ.

By some, I am aware, the eloquent propounder of the sentiment under discussion, is conceived to have meant no more by it, than the trite and common maxim,

that *every man's faith depends upon his country and his parentage,*—that *every person will be what he is taught and trained to be,*—a *Mahometan*, a *Pagan*, or a *Christian;* and that, this being the case, *no man can be accountable for the place of his birth, or the circumstances of his education.*—I can hardly imagine, that *such* a man would announce an opinion so old and so ordinary, with so much of the pomp of recent discovery, and the emphasis of pre-eminent importance. But let me suppose this his meaning:—I would answer, without entering at large into the various questions connected with the opinion—

In the first place, Granting its general truth, (and it would be foolish to dispute it,) it surely cannot be considered as in the least degree invalidating the obligation to *examine the evidences* of what is presented to us as a communication from Deity,—to weigh the grounds of its claim to our acceptance. This obligation lies imperatively on all, without exception, to whom such a record comes. And then the simple question, connected with our *present* subject, comes to be, precisely what has been already stated—whether there be, or be not, in the condition and character of the human heart in general, or of the heart of the individual in particular, any thing that *predisposes* either *for* or *against* it, and that thus goes to bias the mind in the examination of its evidence, and in the denial or acknowledgment of its truth.

Secondly: The manner in which the opinion is stated, —so exceedingly vague and undefined in the meaning of its terms,—only serves to discover the sadly inadequate and erroneous conceptions, so extensively prevalent, of *what it is to be a christian;*—conceptions, which form not the least of the unavoidable and pernicious

effects of the *nationalizing* of christianity,—by which the designation *christian*, from having been, as it was originally, a definite term of spiritual character, distinguishing the few from the many, has degenerated into a mere line of geographical partition; or a shade of colouring, by which, in a map, one region of the globe is marked off from another.—It is perfectly true, that men *may* be,—that they are *most likely* to be,—or, put it as strongly as you please, that they *certainly will* be, christians in *this* sense, according to their country or their parentage, in the same manner as they would be Hindoos or Mussulmen. But that every one who is born of christian parents, and taught christian truth, will be a christian in the proper scriptural acceptation of the name, is a far different proposition,—a proposition as certainly false, as the other is true. Every godly parent feels and laments the difficulty, of instilling Divine truths into the mind, so as to procure for them a cordial acceptance,—and to bring the affections, passions, and desires under the regimen of the principles of spiritual and vital christianity. The whole process of really christian education develops to such parents the strength of the hostile predisposition, and impresses the necessity of an influence superior to parental or to human, for effectually overcoming it.

By others, the sentiment of which I have ventured thus to express my disapproval, has been understood as amounting to no more than the metaphysical axiom, that *belief must necessarily correspond with the perception of evidence, it being in the nature of the thing impossible that the mind should believe, or disbelieve, otherwise than as evidence is, or is not, discerned.*—Now I am far from intending to question the soundness of this axiom. It

is quite entitled to the designation, being a self-evident and indisputable truth. But this admission does not, in the smallest degree, affect our conclusion as to moral responsibility; for one very obvious reason,—that it is precisely on this point, the perception of evidence, that the predisposing causes referred to are apt most powerfully to operate. That in the examination of any question, the perceptions of the mind are affected by the previous state of the inclinations, both in the discernment of the bearings of proof, and in appreciating the value of its different items, is, as I have before observed, true even to a proverb. It is so certain, so universally understood and admitted, that writers on the constitution of the mind, and on moral evidence, insist on the necessity and importance of guarding against such sources of biassing prepossession,—those IDOLS,—(to use the designation given them by Lord Bacon)—which entice the mind from a simple and uncorrupted homage to truth.—To employ a familiar illustration:—when we hear a person say of a proposition which seems exceedingly plain—"I cannot see that," and we marvel at the unaccountable obliquity or dimness of his intellectual vision,—how often do we afterwards discover, that there has been some consideration of *interest*, in one or other of its endless varieties, that has prevented him. His mental sight has been thus obscured, or distorted. There has been a mote in his eye,—the mote of self-interest. He *could not* see, simply because he was *unwilling* to see.

Before proceeding to the direct illustration of the text, in which a predisposition against the truth of God revealed in the gospel is so strongly and generally asserted, I wish to offer one additional observation.—I would not make the eminent person whose sentiment has been the

subject of comment, responsible for more than lies justly to his charge. Now there is a class of persons who may be fond enough to lay hold of his principle, but who lay hold of it unfairly, and for whose conduct it can afford neither cover nor palliation. What his own practice may have been in regard to the Bible, I know not. For ought I can tell, he may have examined its contents and its evidences,—or he may not. I have to do at present only with his words as they stand before me: —and here I find him declaring "the only unanimity "desirable among rational creatures" to be "the agree- "ment proceeding from *full conviction after the freest* "*discussion.*"

The belief or the unbelief, then, which, according to that statement of his views by which our censures must be limited, is considered as exempt from moral imputation, is a belief or an unbelief *preceded by examination of evidence.*—Whatever, indeed, may be thought of belief or unbelief, in themselves, it can never be questioned, that there may be a contraction of guilt by the refusal or the neglect to attend to evidence. The degree of this guilt must be in proportion to the intrinsic magnitude of the subject,—the authority under which it presents itself, and the importance of the consequences depending on the determination of the question at issue.—Now there is a host of unthinking sceptics,—of uninquiring infidels,—to whom the sentiment I have been combating, were it ever so true, can be of no avail. It affords them no shelter. It yields no apology, no palliation of their conduct. It supposes consideration; but they have not considered:— it assumes examination; but they have not examined. Whether belief be voluntary or involuntary, there can be nothing but what is wilful in the neglect or refusal to

attend and to inquire. This admits of no excuse, no extenuation. Investigation is duty; and every thing concurs to aggravate the criminality of neglecting it. The *subjects* are of unutterable magnitude;—the *authority* is the highest that any doctrine can claim;—and the *consequences* are the most momentous that can possibly await the issue of any inquiry. On such a subject, not only is investigation imperiously demanded, but no light, partial, superficial inquiry will discharge the obligation. It must be earnest, persevering, full. No source of evidence that is accessible should be left unexplored. A revelation from our God *must* be desirable,—supremely desirable. I will not reason with a fellow-creature that can question this. His intellect must be disordered; and disordered, there is reason more than to fear, by the power of a perverted conscience and a vitiated heart. And in proportion as such a revelation *is* desirable, should the importance be felt of our not being deceived,—of our neither being, on the one hand, the dupes of a witless credulity, nor the victims, on the other, of an incredulous obstinacy. O how inexpressible the folly and the impiety of the man, who has in his hand what professes to be a communication from the Sovereign and Judge of all, and who does not think it worth his while either to acquaint himself with its contents, or to inquire into its authority! Here surely, if anywhere, there is guilt without apology. The conduct that incurs it is neither *accidental* nor *involuntary*, nor a matter over which there can be *no control*. It is, in all respects, wilful; and therefore, on no just principle, capable of vindication.

The declaration in the second part of the 18th verse—"he that believeth not is condemned already, because he

hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God"—is susceptible of two interpretations:—

1. Men are guilty, as having transgressed the divine law. They lie under a sentence of condemnation; that law having the explicit sanction annexed to it,—"Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." The declaration, therefore, in this part of the text, when taken by itself, might simply mean, that *in consequence* of their not believing in Christ, *the guilt of a violated law still stands to their account.* They remain under the sentence, and exposed to the penalty, as the unavoidable result of their neglecting or refusing the only means of deliverance. In this sense, unbelief is not the *ground* of their condemnation, —but only the *occasion* of their *remaining condemned* on *another* ground.

2. It may express the sentiment, that *unbelief itself is a sin*, by which guilt is contracted, and condemnation incurred;—that "he that believeth not is condemned," not merely *in consequence* of his unbelief, but expressly *on account* of it.—That this latter is the principal meaning of the words, (although not of course to the exclusion of the other, which is inseparably connected with it) is evident from the terms of the 19th verse,—which is explanatory of the statement in the 18th, and a vindication of it from every imputation of severity or injustice:—"And THIS is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men have loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."—In *these* words there is no room for diversity of explanation. Unbelief, or the rejection of the gospel, is most unequivocally and strongly affirmed to have its origin in the love of evil in the human heart, in one or other of its many varieties. The whole

verse may be considered as a commentary on the apostolic phrase,—" an *evil heart of unbelief.*"

The " *deeds* being evil" is a phrase, which must not be restricted, in its application, to the openly wicked, to the notoriously and actively profligate. These are the characters, of whom people in general, when they hear such expressions, are apt to think. But the word " *deeds*" must here be understood inclusively of evil *desires* and *affections*, as well as of what are more properly denominated *works*—of every principle, in short, from which disrelish of divine truth may be conceived to arise. In confirmation of this, it may be observed, that Paul enumerates amongst " the *works* of the flesh," not only wicked actions, but such evil tempers as " hatred," " wrath," and " envy."*—It is obvious, indeed, that, as outward actions are only indications of inward principles, it is not to the actions, but to the principles, that we must trace the dislike of whatever interferes with their indulgence. It is the principles that constitute the character; the actions are only the manifestation of it to others.

The clear affirmation of the text, then, is, that all unbelief of the gospel has a *moral cause*, and that that cause is *evil.* The language is so unequivocal and decisive, that I might safely rest the scriptural authority of the sentiment on this passage alone. It may not be amiss, however, to adduce a few additional proofs, from the Bible, of unbelief being held and treated by its Divine Author as a sin,—as involving guilt, and incurring condemnation.

In the *first* place, I may refer, in evidence, to the *calls* and *invitations*, with which the scriptures abound, to

* Gal. v. 19—21.

receive the gospel as the testimony of God, and to accept its offered blessings.—Such calls and invitations, of which it is needless to quote examples, *must* come with authority. They *must* carry with them an obligation to compliance. Coming from the God of heaven, they cannot be supposed to leave the sinner, who has heard and has refused them, in the very same state in which he previously had been, —with no additional charge against him in the account he has to render. It is altogether inconceivable, that God himself should invite to the acceptance of favours, which his creatures, to whom the offer is made, are at liberty innocently to decline.

But *secondly:* The Bible does not confine itself to calls and invitations:—the acceptance of the gospel testimony is matter of explicit *command:*—"This is his *commandment*, that we believe on the name of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."*—Although, then, in one view, every call and invitation of God must contain in it the essence and force of a command; yet here is something still more express. The gospel is a *divine institute*, as much as any legal order or prescription. It declares the *divine will* as to the way in which men are to be saved; and it has all the force of law. It is called, in contradistinction from the "law of works," the "law of faith." The former is that original constitution of things, according to which man, *as a creature*, held life on the ground of his own obedience, or works:—the latter is that new constitution, to which the violation of the former has given rise, and according to which man, *as a sinner*, is accepted through faith in the merits of another. Both are alike divine, and have the sanction of the same autho-

* 1 John iii. 23.

rity. The latter is as really the law of God in regard to *sinful* man, as the former was his law in regard to man *in innocence:* and the refusal of the testimony and offers of the gospel is as direct a trespass against the new constitution, as the eating of the forbidden fruit was a transgression of the old.—On what principle a *command to believe* proceeds, will afterwards be considered: the present point is, to show that there *is* such a command.

I may notice, *thirdly*, in close connection with the preceding particular, that *faith* is sometimes spoken of as *obedience.*—"They have not all *obeyed* the gospel; for Esaias saith, Lord, who hath *believed* our report?"—"A great company of the priests were *obedient* to the faith." The mystery of the gospel, revealed through the apostles, "is made known to all nations for the *obedience of faith.*"* —I am aware that, in such passages, *obeying* includes more than believing. It includes a giving up of the heart to the influence of the truth believed,—yielding to its holy power and tendencies,—not thinking only, but feeling and acting, according to it: "God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin; but ye have *obeyed from the heart* that form of doctrine which was delivered you." But still, the "belief of the truth," yielding to the force of its evidence, and receiving it as from God, is without doubt the *first* thing expressed by such phraseology. God is *obeyed* when his *testimony is believed;* and all by whom it is refused are ranked among the *dis*obedient.

This will be still more apparent, when we have noticed, *fourthly*, the explicit declarations of the *sinfulness of unbelief*, and the annexation to it of a *sentence of condemnation.*—The text itself, as I have before stated, is a most

* Rom. x. 16. Acts vi. 7. Rom. xvi. 26.

unequivocal instance of this. And the following are in harmony with it:—" When He (the Holy Spirit) is come, he will convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment:—of *sin, because they believe not on me:*"—" Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; *he that believeth not shall be condemned:*" —" He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life; *he that believeth not the Son shall not see life*, but the wrath of God abideth on him:"—" He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself; he that believeth not God, hath made him a liar," (no light or venial guilt surely) " because he hath not believed the record that God gave of his Son:"—" The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that *obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ;* who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in *all them that believe, (because our testimony among you was believed)* in that day."*

Such passages as these must mean something more than that *in consequence* of men's not believing, or availing themselves of the means of pardon, their sins, consisting of violations of the divine law, *remain unforgiven:* they clearly and strongly teach us, that unbelief itself is one of the sins, *on account* of which perdition comes upon the unbeliever. The following powerful and striking

* John xvi. 8, 9. Mark xvi. 15, 16. John iii. 36. 1 John v. 10. 2 Thess. i. 7—10.

expostulation from the book of Proverbs may be added to the passages already cited. It is not less persuasive and touching from the earnestness of pity which it breathes, than it is instructive and profitable as a decisive intimation of truth:—"Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets; she crieth in the chief places of concourse, in the openings of the gates; in the city she uttereth her words, saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn ye at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof: therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil."*

This passage expresses, as plainly as the text does, the *moral cause* of the refusal of sinners to listen to the voice of heavenly wisdom:—they "*love* their simpli-

* Prov. i. 20—33.

city;" they "*delight* in their scorning;" they "*hate* knowledge;" they "*do not choose* the fear of the Lord." This is the same thing as "loving darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil."

Having thus shown you very briefly the light in which unbelief is placed in the scriptures;—having adduced evidence, to which, were it necessary, much more might be added, that, so far from being "held guiltless" as the hue of the skin or the height of the stature, it is condemned as sinful, and threatened with punitive retribution;—we now go on to consider the *grounds* on which it is so regarded, and to vindicate the righteousness of the Divine procedure.

In entering on this part of my subject, I must begin by stating a distinction, which is sufficiently obvious, and yet too frequently lost sight of; that namely, between the *sovereignty* and the *equity* of the Divine administration.—Sovereignty is simply "the good pleasure of God's will," by which he is left at full liberty to do towards his creatures whatever is not inconsistent with equity. Equity is exercised in giving every one his due; and what is due in equity cannot be witheld in sovereignty. In regard to all that is *good*, sovereignty may *go beyond* what is due, but cannot, without a violation of the claims of equity, *keep within* it. As to the infliction of *evil*, it comes not at all within the province of sovereignty; it belongs exclusively to that of equity. The *sovereign infliction of evil* is an anomaly, that can have no place under the righteous government of God. Sovereignty has to do only with the *bestowment of good*. This is its proper department: and here its freedom is without restriction;

its range of beneficence without limits. Equity can neither withold deserved good, nor visit with undeserved evil :—sovereignty may both suspend deserved evil, and confer undeserved good. With regard to creatures, then, that have sinned and are guilty, there may be a sovereign determination to bless and to save : but there can be no sovereign determination to curse and to damn. The curse and damnation are the result, in every case, not of sovereignty, but of equity. There is a decree of salvation ; and from the nature of the thing that decree *must* be sovereign. In nothing else than sovereignty, or Divine good pleasure, *can* it have its origin ; those for whose salvation it provides being such as, in equity, deserve to perish. But there is no sovereign decree of reprobation and perdition. The sole determination, on this side of the alternative, is the determination of equity to *punish sin.* Salvation is the result of a purpose of sovereignty ; damnation is the fulfilment of a sentence of equity. The former presupposes unworthiness ; the latter, desert. Merited salvation, and unmerited perdition, are ideas alike incongruous and contradictory.

On these principles, if unbelief infers guilt and condemnation, it *must* be regarded as, in the principle from which it arises, involving some description of *moral turpitude.* The sentence is not pronounced, nor the punishment inflicted, in arbitrary vindictiveness. " The righteous Lord, who loveth righteousness," must see ground in equity for both. There is nothing, we may be assured, more arbitrary in the punishment of unbelief of Divine truth, than in the punishment of any transgression of the Divine law. The one is as much a matter of equity as the other. If unbelief involved no moral

delinquency, on no principle of justice could its punishment be vindicated.

I must now observe further, that there are *three thing* which appear to be necessary to the guilt of unbelief:—these are, *capacity of understanding*, *opportunity of knowledge*, and *sufficiency of evidence*.—The absence of *any one* of these would nullify just responsibility.

Where there is a *natural incapacity of understanding*, it is quite obvious that there can be no accountableness, no guilt. This is more than admitted, it is the sentiment distinctly expressed, in the language of our Lord to the Pharisees, after the cure of the blind beggar recorded in the ninth chapter of the gospel according to John. "For judgment," said Jesus, "I am come into this world, that they who see not might see, and that they who see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees who were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, IF YE WERE BLIND, YE SHOULD HAVE NO SIN: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth."—What these Pharisees said of themselves was, in *two* respects, true. They possessed natural faculties of discernment, powers of mental vision, in many of them acute and vigorous:—and they had the scriptures of the Old Testament in their hands; they were not unacquainted with their contents; and, as far as capacity of understanding went, they were quite capable of discerning the correspondence between the types, and predictions, and promises, which they contained, and all that they heard and saw in Jesus of Nazareth. "Therefore their sin remained."—But to discuss the causes that prevented their discerning what their natural capacity fully qualified

them to discover, would anticipate a subsequent part of our subject.*

The second thing mentioned as necessary to unbelief's assuming a moral character, and becoming chargeable with guilt, is as obviously essential as the first—*opportunity of knowledge.*—The unbelief condemned in the Bible is not that which arises from unavoidable or involuntary ignorance:—for this, indeed, cannot with propriety be denominated unbelief at all. No man can be said to *disbelieve* that which he has not the means of *knowing;* that which, from whatever circumstances, has never been brought before his mind. This, it is plain, can never be a legitimate ground of condemnation. The Bible condemns no man for not knowing what he never heard of, or for not believing what he could not know—for not obeying a law which was never promulgated to him, or not receiving a message which never reached his ears. No such thing. The principles of the Bible on this subject are those of the most unimpeachable equity. *Ignorance* is criminal, only when it arises from wilful inattention, or from aversion of heart to truth. *Unbelief* involves guilt, when it is the effect and manifestation of the same aversion,—of a want of *will* to that which is right and good.

* The particular thus briefly touched upon disposes of all cases of idiocy and natural intellectual incapacity. In such cases, it must be obvious, there can be no responsibility. There is one apparent exception indeed—when the mental powers have been disordered in their exercise, and bereft of their energy, by *moral* causes,—by any description, for example, of dissipation and profligacy. But the exception, after all, is only apparent: for in such instances, the person's guilt does not properly consist in his not exerting a capacity of which he is not possessed, but in his having, by his previous misconduct, deprived himself of that capacity.

The necessity of the third thing mentioned to the criminality of unbelief, namely *sufficiency of evidence*, may be confirmed by an appeal to the very highest authority, that of the Divine Author of the gospel himself. Look to John xv. 22, 24. "If I had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin. If I had not done among them the works which no other man did, they had not had sin; but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father."—In this passage, all the three requisites to responsibility may be considered as united;—the second and third being expressly specified, and the first clearly presupposed. The statement of the Saviour is, that, had they been without either means of knowledge, or sufficiency of proof, or, by obvious implication, natural capacity of apprehending the meaning and discerning the evidence of what was taught them, they should not have been chargeable with sin, in rejecting his claims, and denying his doctrine; there would have been no guilt in their unbelief.

But here a question comes in our way, of essential consequence in our present investigation—a turning point in the inquiry:—What is to be understood by *sufficiency of evidence?*—Essential, however, as the question is, it is so only in some of its general principles. It is not necessary that we take upon us (what would be far beyond our province as creatures) to specify, theoretically and *a priori*, the precise description and amount of evidence which the Divine Being should be required to furnish, as sufficient to certify, to the satisfaction of his intelligent creatures, a testimony from himself. Such principles as I shall now proceed very briefly to state, seem enough for our purpose.

First of all, then, the principle itself already laid down, must be universally admitted as an obvious and incontrovertible one,—that a revelation which men are *required* to believe, and unbelief of which incurs condemnation and punishment, *must* be accompanied with evidence really sufficient of its Divine original. This, it is manifest, is the only ground on which a command to believe can legitimately rest, or a threatening of punishment to unbelief be susceptible of vindication.—And this being granted, it is farther clear, that the Author of the testimony,—who is at the same time the author of our rational constitution, and who knows what is in man, and has a perfect discernment of the description of evidence which the nature of the case admits, and which the reason of the creature requires,—cannot but have it in his power to provide such proof as shall, in kind and in measure, be adapted to both, and such therefore as shall be *reasonably sufficient* for the conviction of every one, possessed of intellect, to whom it shall be presented.

But there is another general principle not less obvious than these,—that *sufficient evidence* must not be understood to mean such evidence as shall *infallibly constrain* the believing assent of every individual. When the subject is a physical force, applied for the accomplishment of a physical purpose,—the raising of a weight for instance, or the removal of an obstacle;—if the force have a direct and fair application, we judge of its *sufficiency* by its *efficiency*:—if the weight is not raised, if the obstacle does not give way,—the conclusion is, that the power is not sufficient. But it is not thus we must form our judgment on subjects of moral evidence. Such evidence, every discerning mind must at once perceive, may be fully *sufficient*, without being

efficient. The want of efficacy may arise, not from any deficiency in the evidence, but from causes in the mind to which the evidence is presented. If these causes consist in, or arise from, *natural incapacity*, they exonerate the party from blame-worthiness. But if they be of a *moral* kind,—if they are to be found in evil principles and passions in the heart, blinding the understanding, perverting truth, and resisting evidence; the guilt contracted, whether the unbeliever be himself sensible of it or not, may be very deep.—In the physical analogy used above, it is assumed that the power employed has a direct and fair application. It is only on this supposition that the conclusion of its insufficiency, from its failing to produce the effect, is legitimate. The position, or shape, or other circumstances, of the weight or the obstacle, may interfere with the free contact and advantageous application of the power:—in which case, its failure may be imputable, not to its intrinsic insufficiency, but to these untoward circumstances. In a similar way, the character and situation of human minds may obstruct the legitimate operation of evidence upon them, and culpably hinder the admission of obnoxious truth.

That there may be evidences and indications of truth which are in themselves sufficient, and which yet do not lead to the knowledge and conviction of it, may be satisfactorily shown from another department of Divine discovery. Respecting the manifestations of God in the works of nature as enjoyed by the heathen, the apostle Paul says, Rom. i. 20. "For from (or since) the creation of the world, the invisible things of God, even his eternal power and Godhead, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made: so that they are without

excuse."—It is, in these words, evidently assumed, or, rather, explicitly asserted, that there *are*, in the works of creation, demonstrations sufficiently clear and convincing of the being and perfections of God:—so that, if men are *not* led to right views of these subjects, it is not for want of adequate manifestation or evidence of the truth. It is on this ground alone that the conclusion —"they are without excuse" can possibly be maintained. Their ignorance could not be inexcusable, were their means of knowledge not sufficient:—their failure to discover the truth would be blameless, in proportion as the sources of discovery were obscure or scanty.

In the 28th verse of the same chapter, the cause is assigned, why the clear and multiplied evidences of the existence and attributes of God, which present themselves in creation and providence, did not lead men to the right knowledge, and faith, and worship, of the One Supreme:—"They DID NOT LIKE to retain God in their knowledge." This is the simple cause, then, why the knowledge of God was lost, that is conveyed in his WORKS. There was no relish for the lesson,—no complacency in the discovery;—it was not in unison with the tendencies of man's fallen nature. The knowledge was originally possessed. It did not require, therefore, to be *discovered*, but only to be *remembered*. Yet with every possible advantage for its being retained, it was, notwithstanding, lost: and, in the passage of scripture I have just referred to, the loss is expressly ascribed to a moral cause.

If these things be so, might we not reasonably expect, that the same cause should operate in a similar way, in regard to the knowledge of God communicated in his WORD? That it *does* so operate, is precisely what our

text affirms. There is a perfect coincidence between the statement of the apostle respecting the knowledge imparted by nature and tradition, and that of our Lord respecting the discoveries of the gospel. When the former says, " They did not like to retain God in their knowledge,"—and the latter, " Light is come into the world, and men have loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil;" the sentiment is one; the same principle is represented, only in different terms, as producing the same result.—The language of our Lord is without exception, with regard to all who reject the gospel testimony. The grounds of this universality are afterwards to be considered. At present, all that we notice is, the *sameness of the cause* assigned for the ignorance and rejection of the contents of *both* the volumes of Divine discovery.

The evidence, then, of the Divine authority of the Scriptures, may neither be defective in its nature, nor deficient in its degree; whilst yet it may, in many cases, be rendered inefficacious by the predispositions of those to whose minds it is presented. By these predispositions they may be prevented from discerning and appreciating its force. And of this undiscerned and inefficacious evidence, I am now led to remark, a great deal may be found to lie in the *contents themselves* of the rejected revelation. It is reasonable, from analogy, to expect that this should be the case. If the impress of the Divine character is borne by the *other* works of God; much more might we look for it here,—in a direct communication from himself of his mind and will. We might previously conclude, that its nature should indicate its origin;—that it should be " its own witness." That multitudes to whom this revelation comes do not

discern in it these traces of Deity, is obviously no valid proof that it does not contain them. From the matter of fact which presents itself throughout the Heathen world, that men have failed to deduce right conceptions of God from the works of creation, Deists and sceptics do not think of drawing the inference that these works *do not contain* sufficient indications of his being and perfections. On the contrary, they maintain their sufficiency; and on this very ground question the necessity of revelation. They speculate on the clearness and fulness of the lessons of nature; and by the superiority of their speculations to those of philosophers who have not had their advantages, make it evident that they derive their unacknowledged light from the very revelation which they proudly disown. And yet, while they thus loftily and confidently speculate, there is more than a possibility that the very same principles may be preventing *them* from discerning the marks of Deity *in the Bible*, which prevent *the Heathen* from discovering these marks *in nature*. The communications made in it may not be *to their minds*. They may not *like* them.—There is indeed the greater probability of this in the one case than in the other, inasmuch as in the written revelation we look for more of the discovery of the *moral* perfections of God, than in the works of his hands. And it is these that are the more direct objects of human aversion. The others, usually distinguished by the designation of his *natural* attributes, are obnoxious to dislike, chiefly, perhaps I should say solely, in consequence of their connection with these. From this cause it not infrequently happens, that when, in their minds or in their discourse, men can separate the two, we may hear a great deal of the language of seemingly devout eulogy

of Deity, from the lips of those who, alas! make it sadly manifest otherwise, that they have no spiritual taste for the excellences of his moral nature,—his purity and justice, and infinite separation from all evil. How many specimens of such commendation,—elegant sometimes, and sublime, and captivating,—are furnished by the discourses of natural historians and philosophers;—in which God appears as a wonderful artist and generous benefactor, incomparable in skill, transcendent in power, and inexhaustible in bounty;—whilst to the very eulogists themselves, the Bible views of his holiness and grace would prove insufferably offensive.

From all this, then, you will, I trust, be sensible, that *manifestation* and *evidence* may be *sufficient*, and *even superfluous*, and yet those to whom they are presented be neither enlightened nor convinced by them. The cause of the failure may lye *in themselves;* and it may be evil,—deeply evil,—and the just ground of condemnation.—It is admitted, that, to be a legitimate ground of moral responsibility, the unbelief must be affected by moral causes, and that it can involve guilt, only as springing from an evil heart. That in regard to the discoveries of the gospel, it must be influenced by such causes, is evident from the very nature of those discoveries. The gospel is not a merely speculative doctrine. It is not, in this respect, of the nature of abstract propositions, in geometry or metaphysics. It is, in its substance and tendency, moral. The very *facts* of the gospel may be truly denominated *moral facts;* inasmuch as they contain in them the display of the purest and most sublime *moral principles*, and the enforcement upon the conscience of the highest *moral motives*. Now, whatever is thus, in its nature and tendencies, moral,

must either harmonize on the one hand, or conflict on the other, with the moral state of the heart. The latter, as we have seen, is peremptorily affirmed, in the text and other parts of scripture, to be the case between the discoveries of the gospel and the principles and feelings of the natural or unrenewed man. This opposition is, without exception or qualification, declared, by the lips of the gracious Author of the gospel himself, to be the cause of the rejection of his testimony:—and it now becomes my province, depending on Divine aid, to endeavour to make good the position, that ALL UNBELIEF OF THE GOSPEL HAS ITS ORIGIN IN EVIL.

Leaving, however, the establishment of this position to another discourse, I shall conclude the present by repeating, that such is the unequivocal affirmation of the scriptures. Now the word that contains the affirmation is proved to be Divine, by an immense accumulation of the most conclusive evidence. I therefore believe, that the God himself who searches the heart has declared unbelief to be a sin inferring the pains of hell. I am assuredly satisfied that this it *cannot* do, except as arising from an *evil heart.* It is not for me to enter into the heart's secrets. This is *his* prerogative. And if he who "knoweth all things" has declared the source of unbelief to be evil, I might leave it with himself to convict the conscience of the truth of his own authoritative testimony. An attempt to prove it, however, may serve to detect some of the modes of prevailing self-deception; and by undeceiving the self-deluded, to save their souls from death.

SERMON II.

JOHN iii. 18, 19.

"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

I NOW proceed, as proposed in the conclusion of the former discourse, to illustrate and prove the position, that ALL UNBELIEF OF THE GOSPEL HAS ITS ORIGIN IN EVIL.

I have already more than once repeated the principle, so essential in this discussion, that, in order to unbelief being the subject of moral responsibility at all, it must have some connection with the exercise of the will; and that, to constitute it a ground of just condemnation, it must have its source in an evil heart.—There can be no reasonable question, that, if it *does* arise from such a source, the sentence against it is fair and righteous. The only remaining inquiry, therefore, is, whether the position announced for proof be capable of establishment:—whether unbelief be, or be not, in all cases, the effect and indication of some morally evil principle.—This you

will perceive, defines and limits our subject of investigation. The Bible, we have seen, affirms, frequently and explicitly, that it *is* so; and on this ground pronounces its damnatory sentence.—I might, as I noticed in closing last discourse, leave the matter here, in the assurance that God can bring home his own word to the conviction of every conscience, and constrain the unbelieving sinner to acknowledge its truth.—It may be of use, however, to vindicate the sentence; and in doing so, to detect and expose some of the various fallacies by which men are prevented from perceiving and owning it to be as the Bible has said. The heart has been pronounced, by Him who best knows it, "deceitful above all things;" and in thousands of ways, accordingly, does it successfully impose upon itself. It is no proof of its being otherwise than the word of God represents it to be, that men are not sensible of the truth of the representation, but are disposed to question and to deny it. This may be only a manifestation of the heart's deceitfulness. It is of the very nature of depravity, to make the subject of it insensible of the extent to which it exists, and of the force with which it operates, in his own bosom. To impart sensibility to its existence and influence, is the very first step of the Holy Spirit's work in conversion:—he "*convinces of sin.*" He gives the sinner to see his real character, and to feel deeply what before had never affected or troubled him. And it may be stated as a fact, which admits of no exceptions, that there never was an individual brought to the faith of "the gospel of the grace of God," who did not humbly acknowledge, whatever might be the notions he had previously entertained of himself and of the causes of his unbelieving rejection of it, that he had really been under the influence of an evil

and self-deceived heart,—a heart at enmity with God,—a heart, of which it had been the very deceitfulness that had made him before think well. Such has been the uniform admission of all who have believed in Christ, whatever may have been the variety (and that has been endless) of their previous characters.

And this diversity of character amongst unbelievers is *still* endless;—admitting of, and actually exemplifying, every modification of aspect, which principles and affections merely natural, in all their modes and measures of combination, can possibly assume. Yet, in assigning the causes of men's unbelief, we dare not abate or qualify the statement of the Divine word,—that in every one of these endlessly diversified cases, it has its origin in one or other of the varieties of an evil heart,—"a heart not right with God."

I wish it to be distinctly understood, that, when I speak of unbelief, I mean unbelief of THE GOSPEL:—not *infidelity*, in the ordinary acceptation of the word;—the open and avowed rejection of the scriptures as a revelation from God. There are many, very many, alas! who, though they are not infidels in this sense of the designation,—but, on the contrary, profess to believe the Bible to be the word of God, are yet lamentably ignorant of that which it chiefly reveals, or as far as they theoretically know, are decidedly opposed to it.—The Jews of our Lord's day, as we learn from his mode of addressing them, were unbelievers of this description. "Do not think," says he, "that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my

words ?" *—What! it might be asked, did the Jews not believe in Moses? In one sense, assuredly, they did. They believed *himself* to have had a Divine commission, and *his writings* to possess Divine authority. But they missed the substance of all that Moses wrote. "He wrote of ME," says Christ. "The testimony of Jesus was the spirit," both of the "prophecies" which he delivered, and of the entire system of ceremonial observances, which, under his mediation, was established amongst them. This they understood not. Under the influence of a perverse and worldly temper of mind, all that related to the Messiah was misinterpreted by them. They knew not and believed not in him, whom Moses in his writings described and predicted, as the Seed of the woman who was to bruise the head of the serpent; as the Seed of Abraham, in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed; as the prophet like unto himself, whom God was to raise up unto them from among their brethren, and to whom, under pain of divine vengeance, they were to hearken; as the atoning High Priest, prefigured by Aaron in his pontifical glory; and as the propitiatory sacrifice, typified by all the victims whose blood was ordered to be shed at the altar, and to be sprinkled within the veil.—There was a perfect correspondence between the "*writings*" of Moses, and the "*words*" of Christ; so that the rejection of the latter showed their unbelief of the former. To "believe Moses" meant, not merely to believe that his writings possessed Divine authority, but to believe what those writings contained, according to its proper meaning and design. It is one thing to believe the authority by which a messenger speaks, and quite another thing to believe the message which, by that au-

* John v. 45—47.

thority, he delivers. The authority may be admitted, whilst a conception materially erroneous is formed of that which is declared; and by this means, the sanction of the authority may be attached to what is false and illusory. If, in such a case, the cause of the misapprehension were found to lye in the unintelligible nature of the message, there could be nothing in it sinful:—but if it lye in the capricious perverseness and incredulous worldliness of those to whom the message is delivered, by which they are led to make their wishes their interpreters, and to prefer the commentary of those wishes, because it better suits their secular inclinations, to the spiritual meaning of the messenger;—if the misunderstanding be thus what we usually denominate *wilful*;—then the unbelief of the truth, and the faith of the error, may be proportionally criminal, and the divinely commissioned ambassador may rise up in the judgment, and condemn the perverters of his testimony: "There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust."

Let it be remembered, then, (for on all such subjects —subjects that involve the character of the Divine Being himself, and the destinies of his creatures for eternity, there ought to be nothing ambiguous,—nothing but plain dealing,) that we consider the Bible as giving the designation of THE GOSPEL, by way of eminence and of exclusive distinction, to a certain definite and clearly expressed assemblage of doctrines;—the doctrines of salvation by free grace, and divine influence, on the ground of the merits and intercession of a Mediator; of the guilt and depravity, the condemnation and spiritual impotence of men; of acceptance with God by faith alone in the righteousness and atonement of Him who was "delivered up for the offences of sinners, and raised again for their

justification," to the exclusion of all self-dependance and self-glorying;—of renovation of heart by the power of the Spirit, through the operation of that testimony which proclaims mercy to the chief of transgressors, and to all transgressors alike, who receive it in simplicity as the truth of God. I mean, in a word, the scripture "record, that God hath GIVEN to us eternal life, and that this life is IN HIS SON;"—that "the WAGES of sin is DEATH; but the GIFT of God is ETERNAL LIFE, THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD."

If any shall be startled at this, and shall pronounce us illiberal and narrow-minded, and insist upon a more general and comprehensive acceptation of the terms *Christianity* and *Gospel*,—we cannot help it. Nothing, as we conceive, can be more dishonouring to the God of the Bible, than to suppose that he has given us in it a revelation that is *not explicit* on the very subject that forms its main article, and which it is chiefly designed to set forth:—and nothing, we are confident, is more extensively injurious to the best interests of men, than a contrary sentiment, by which an indeterminate vagueness and laxity is thrown over the scriptures,—confounding things that essentially differ, and allowing almost every thing which a man may choose to think, and to say he believes to be called by the common name of Christianity. —I am anxious, then, I repeat, that this should be marked and kept in mind. In an attempt to point out the moral causes of unbelief, all would necessarily be confusion, were that not distinctly understood which unbelief rejects.—In treatises on the evidences of Christianity, I have many a time been disappointed and grieved at the vagueness,—and worse than vagueness, the absolute erroneousness and illegitimacy, of the modes of reason-

ing from the nature or genius of its peculiar discoveries; when attempts have been made to demonstrate its *reasonableness*, on grounds that involve a total misconception of *what it really is*. I have lamented, on seeing the Divine workmanship of the casket so admirably pointed out, that the value and virtues of the jewel contained in it should be so mistakenly or deficiently apprehended:—and my comfort has been, that the force and conclusiveness of the *external* evidence are not at all invalidated by an incorrect exhibition of the *internal* and *experimental*. —I have stated generally, but I trust intelligibly, the view of the Gospel on which the whole of the following reasonings proceed. In the course of the reasonings themselves, that view will be more fully brought out. The justness of them, I need hardly say, depends, to a very considerable extent, perhaps I should say *entirely*, on its scriptural authority: for if it could be fairly made out, that this view is not scriptural—that it is not a correct representation of "the faith once delivered to the saints,"—the basis of the reasonings, I am ready to admit, would effectually be taken from beneath them. But on no subject did I ever write with more entire freedom from all apprehension, than I do on this. The word of God is, on these topics, so plain, and full, and explicit, that "he who runs may read."

There are three general sources, to one or other of which unbelief of the gospel may fairly, I conceive, be traced. These are *profligacy*, *thoughtlessness*, and *pride*, —the last subdividing itself into various kinds, of which the chief are also three—the pride of *worldly distinction*, the pride of *wisdom*, and the pride of *self-righteousness*.

I shall call your attention to these particulars in suc-

cession, endeavouring to show, in regard to each of them, how the principle of the text applies.

I. *In the first place,* then, there is the unbelief of PROFLIGACY.

I refer, in this particular, to men who live in open sin; whose general course of conduct proclaims to all that "there is no fear of God before their eyes;" who "walk after the sight of their eyes and the imagination of their hearts," and say, in the true spirit of undisguised rebellion "against the Lord, and against his Anointed, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us:"—"What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?"—There will be little hesitation, I should presume, in admitting what the source of unbelief must be in *this* case. Here there is abundant practical manifestation of an *evil heart.* For what is the legitimate proof of inward evil principle?—what the most decisive mark of enmity against God? Let an inspired apostle answer the question: "The carnal mind is enmity against God; FOR *it is not subject to the law of God.*"* Rebellion in conduct is the proof of rebellion in principle; a bad life, the effect and evidence of a bad heart. The effect is uniform; the evidence immediate and unequivocal. The fruit indicates the nature of the tree; the streams the character of the fountain. "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth that which is evil."

The intimate connection between the state of the heart and the outward character or course of life, is still more strongly expressed by the apostle, when to the statement of the fact that the carnal mind *is not*

* Romans viii. 7.

subject to the law of God, he adds the contradiction involved in the supposition of such subjection—"NEITHER INDEED CAN BE."—If the carnal mind be *enmity against God*, nothing can be more evident, than that it cannot be subject to a law, of which the first and fundamental principle is *love to God*. The nature of the inability is manifest. It is entirely moral; enmity against God being the essence in principle of all that is evil. If there be not sin in this enmity, there is no sin in the universe; nor is it even possible that a conception of sin can be formed by the human mind. From a heart under the power of this enmity, nothing truly good can possibly proceed. Whatever proceeds that has the semblance of good, can have the semblance only. An ungodly heart will discover itself in an ungodly life, with the same kind of certainty (as far as things natural can resemble and represent things moral and spiritual) as that with which "a tree is known by its fruit."—"The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God"—expresses the fact in the moral world, that the nature of the inward principles and affections is indicated by the outward conduct; just as, in the natural world, "a tree is known by its fruit" expresses the fact, that the kind, or the healthy or unhealthy state, of the tree is discovered by the nature and the qualities of its produce. —When the apostle subjoins, "neither indeed CAN BE," he declares an impossibility in the department of morals, corresponding to that which our Lord refers to in the department of external nature—"A corrupt tree CANNOT bring forth good fruit, neither CAN a good tree bring forth evil fruit."

Yet, simple and conclusive as is the principle of all such inferences from the external to the internal, from

the life to the heart; even here the heart's deep deceitfulness at times evinces itself, and the proneness of human nature to palliate transgression, and to make allowances for evil. Even to the open profligate, to the devotee of vicious pleasures, to the licentious despiser of all moral and decorous restraints, how often do we hear the designation *good-hearted* applied, by some with inconsiderate lightness, and by others with a simpering and palliative sentimentalism, that passes itself, with those who cherish it, for virtue. The indulgence shown to certain kinds and courses of libertinism is such, that a man, and especially a young man, may be, in no ordinary degree, wild and dissolute, without forfeiting the credit of a good heart:—"He is not so correct, to be sure, as he ought to be; but he has great goodness of heart about him; he is no one's enemy but his own."—But this is only one of the numberless delusions, by which men impose upon themselves and one another. It arises from that overlooking of God in their estimates of evil;—from that deep-seated principle of *ungodliness*, which is the deadly and pervading sin of our whole nature. All disobedience is the expression and evidence of evil principle,—of a heart, whatever may be its natural affections towards fellow-creatures, at variance with the character and the will of God.

Now it is surely no matter for wonder, that the gospel, which contains a discovery so full and so impressive of the holy purity of the Divine Being, of the hateful and damning nature of all sin, and of the certainty and fearfulness of the sanctions of a broken law,—should find no relish or ready acceptance here. It is no wonder that it should be refused admission; and that such men, sensible that it condemns them, should seek to quiet their con-

sciences and find ease to themselves in their vicious courses, by discovering and retailing the most plausible objections to it. They " walk after their own lusts, and say, Where is the promise of his coming ?"

Even such characters are sometimes known to take up, amongst other grounds of rejection, the common charge against the gospel, of its slackening the restraints of moral obligation, and thus tending to immorality and licentiousness. How passing strange !—what anomalous, unaccountable presumption !—It is one amongst the many demonstrative evidences of the falsehood of such an allegation against the gospel, that *the licentious are its enemies*. Were the charge well-founded, they, of all men, instead of hating and opposing it, would try to persuade themselves of its truth. It would be acceptable and palatable. It would have all the recommendation of good news. For nothing assuredly could be more welcome to a licentious man, than to be told how he might " continue in sin," and yet " grace abound." The very disposition of the wicked to oppose the gospel should be considered as a testimony from them to its holy tendency. If it encouraged sin, it would be a favourite with the sinner. The real cause of the opposition of such persons, is stated by Christ in the verses immediately following the text :—" For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."

It is unnecessary to enlarge on this particular. It will hardly be questioned, that in the unbelief of characters of this first description, there must be involved the operation of evil principle :—and if there be, there must be guilt.

Theirs is surely, if it be anywhere at all to be found, the "evil heart of unbelief." Their hostility to the gospel is dictated by alienation from God. There can be here no reasonable hesitation to apply the words of the text: "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and that men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

II. The *second* description of unbelief which I proposed to notice, is that of THOUGHTLESSNESS, or INCONSIDERATION.

This, perhaps, would be more correctly designated the *absence of faith*, than *positive unbelief*. It possesses more, certainly, of the nature of a negation, inasmuch as a man can hardly, with propriety, be said either to believe or disbelieve what he has never considered. Yet with whom, unless with unbelievers, can the inattentive and inconsiderate be classed? All must come under the general denomination, who have the means of knowledge, and continue regardless;—and negative as their unbelief may be, it is deeply criminal, and alas! most extensively prevalent.—The persons of whom I now speak, and of whom the multitude is so great, are not, like the class of whom I have already spoken, open profligates. They are not addicted to any of those courses which the world calls vicious. They may even in their lives be sober, decent, and respectable. But they are immersed in the businesses, the amusements, and the social intercourse of life. In enjoying the pleasures, and pursuing the honours and possessions of the world, each according to his taste, or according to the peculiarity of controlling circumstances, with all the ceaseless bustle of eager emulation,—they are thoroughly employed;—their time and their attention quite taken up. They go on in this course from day to

day, and from year to year, without a serious thought being devoted to the inquiry, unutterably momentous as it is, whether the gospel be true or false. There is no fixing them to the subject. They have other things to mind. There is for ever something ready with an imperious claim for present precedence. They say to all who would invite them to serious reflection, and they say to the occasional convictions of their own minds, "Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee." They are far from being resolved never to think. But they cannot think *now:* and, as each hour of the future becomes successively present, the same apology recurs, and the time for thinking never arrives. It continues always a time *to come.* They fancy indeed they do no great harm: they are busy; they have not leisure; and they cannot help it. They flatter themselves, that it is rather a thing they *cannot* than a thing they *will not* do. Conscience may at particular moments be sensible of a misgiving twinge: but it is neither severe nor lasting. It is easily suppressed, and quickly forgotten, amidst the "vain stir" of the world, and the countenance of ten thousand examples.

Such persons will not admit that they are unbelievers, and would be grievously offended were you to call them so. But unbelievers the Bible pronounces them; and, little as they may think of it, their unbelief is far from innocent.—Is there no guilt, think you, my hearers, in refusing, or even neglecting, to examine what professes to come from the infinite God!—in trifling with his claims!—in putting off his demands to be heard!—in preferring the world, in any of its forms, to him and to his proffered love!—in treating with lightness and disregard what he pronounces, and, as "the only wise God,"

cannot but pronounce, of incomparably higher importance than the objects on which these persons—(are none of *you* amongst them?)—expend their thoughts, their time, their labour, their anxieties, and their regrets!—Is there no guilt in the apology offered for such neglect—"We have no time?" What? Have you not your time from God? is it not in him that you live, and move, and have your being? And has HE no right to dictate how that time shall be employed?—no title to claim any portion of it for himself?—or what he *does* claim, are you at liberty to refuse him?—And yet, it is not so much for himself that he makes the demand:—it is for your own best interests. It is not the demand of angry authority, insisting on homage: it is the demand of tender mercy, wooing its object to happiness, and making that your duty, which he knows to be your felicity. He can be happy without you;—you cannot, without him. You cannot in time; you cannot in eternity. Your refusal, therefore, to listen to his voice, is characterised not less by ingratitude, than by impiety and folly. What! no time—presumptuous worm of the dust—no time to think of God!—"the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways!"—on whom thou dependest for every instant of that life, which thou art spending in despiteful disregard of Him!—to whose justice every thing has been more than forfeited by thee, and who, in sovereignty and in righteousness, has thy being and thy well-being at his disposal!—no time to think of God!—of his nature and character—of his relations to thyself—of his claims upon thee—of the intimations to thee of his mind and will—of his denunciations of vengeance, and his kind proposals for thy good! And is there no criminality in drawing excuses from *self* for *forgetfulness of God*;—

from *time*, for the neglect of *eternity;*—from "trifles light as air," for disregard of the weighty interests of the immortal soul,—which God has shown that he values so highly, by *doing* so much, and *giving* so much, for its redemption! O! if it be true, that God has "so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish but have everlasting life,"—is there no guilt in slighting this love, and this life?

Let me suppose a son to have transgressed against his father, and to have incurred his merited and heavy displeasure. The affectionate parent is anxious to speak with him. His bowels yearn over his child. He longs, painfully longs, to open his heart. He has proposals of forgiveness, and of returning kindness to make to him, to bring him to a right mind, to subdue him to penitential sorrow, and restore him to confidence and favour. With the dignified energy and persuasive tenderness of paternal affection, he addresses him:—and the stubborn and scornful youth turns short on his heel, and tells him *he has not time to hear him*—he has got *other things to mind;* discovering at once contempt of his father's displeasure, and supercilious disregard of the offers of his reconciliation and love? Would not you, with indignant severity, pronounce on such conduct the unhesitating sentence of reprobation, as unnatural and monstrous? Would not you be shocked by his light-heartedness, by his busy application to other concerns, and by every indication about him of his being, in such circumstances, capable of any enjoyment? O how much more then ought you to be shocked, when you see a sinner refusing to listen to the voice of a beseeching God!—telling him he has not leisure to attend to what he says!—"making light" of his invi-

tations, and going off " to his farm or his merchandise." Surely the language of God to such is right, and reasonable, and just,—" Therefore, it is come to pass, that, as I cried and they would not hear, so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the Lord of Hosts." *

If we *are* at a loss to find ground of application for the words of our text—" *their deeds were evil*"—to *this* case, surely we *ought not* to be so. The *principle* of the whole character of such men is evil. For what is it? Is it not a preference of the world to God? How amazing the deceitfulness and wickedness of the heart—that allows men to be guilty of this without the consciousness of its being evil! Evil it is; and deeply evil: and all the *deeds* that are dictated by such a principle, partake of the evil of their principle, and incur righteous condemnation. Men may fondly flatter themselves, that whilst, in their pursuit of the world, they give every man his due, add humanity to justice, and do harm to nobody, no one has any title to say aught against them. But they forget that there is ANOTHER who demands HIS due,—and who, *as* his due, seeks the affectionate homage of a believing heart, and the practical service of a godly as well as a sober and righteous life:—they forget, that *so long as the heart is not his*, all is evil—evil only—evil continually:—that a habitual regardlessness of that infinite Being, with the indications of whose majesty and love they are on every hand so closely and pressingly surrounded, must of itself be quite a sufficient evidence of a deeply depraved mind; and that the virtue which, in principle and in act, terminates on fellow-creatures, to the entire, or almost entire exclusion of that Being, is, in

* Zech. vii. 13.

truth, unworthy of the name, being destitute of the most essential element of goodness:—and to the unbelief of inconsiderate thoughtlessness, the words of the text may, therefore, without any hesitating qualification, be legitimately applied:—"This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

Were a man to neglect his worldly business, and the temporal interests of his family, and to assign as his reason, that he was so entirely taken up about the concerns of his soul and of eternity, that he really could find no leisure to attend to earthly things,—his apology would not be sustained;—nor would it be right that it should:—for it is part of the scriptural character enjoined on the godly man, that he be "not slothful in business;" and it is the recorded decision of heaven, that, "if any man provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." The beauty of religion too consists in giving every duty, to self, to man, and to God, its proper time, place, and measure. And whilst, on these grounds, the person who should offer such a plea could not have the approbation even of those who fear God,—he would meet, poor man! with little sympathy and little quarter from the ungodly world. Every mouth would be open against him, in the severity of unmeasured censure, the sneer of affected pity, or the bitterness of sarcastic contumely. The censure, I have admitted, would be just. The man's "deeds would be evil."—But let us, for a moment, look at the case. Shall a heavy sentence of condemnation be made to light on the man who neglects time for eternity, and *he* pass without rebuke who neglects eternity for time? Shall the defence be sustained,

that pleads the incessant occupations of the present world as precluding the possibility of attending to the concerns of the world to come; whilst the plea is thrown over the bar as unsound and frivolous, that would vindicate the want of interest about the concerns of the present from the absorbing influence of an intense solicitude about that which is future and eternal? Put time and eternity, with their respective interests, into opposite scales,—and tell me which is the heavier, and of which the claims are the most imperious. If you hold as valid the apology from the engagements of time for inconsideration about eternity, the opposite apology should be admitted to possess a validity superior in conclusiveness, in the precise ratio, (if you can estimate it) of eternity to time!—I have already said, that in neither case is the plea well-founded:—but on the supposition that the *principle* of it were at all admissible, the *strength* of it would be greater, even by infinitude itself, in the one case than in the other; —and if on both sides there be guilt and folly, I need not say in what relative proportions.

Let it not be alleged, that the concerns of this world are *present* and those of the world to come *future;*— that what is present has the first and most immediate claim; and that he is therefore more culpable who neglects the present for the future, than he who neglects the future for the present.—The pretext is futile, on two obvious grounds. In the first place, the interests of a never-ending existence are so transcendently superior in magnitude to those of a few transitory years, that *were it necessary* (which it is not) to the securing of the former, that the latter should be even utterly disregarded, it would, beyond all question, be the extreme of infatuation to hesitate about the alternative:—and secondly, *future*

things, in this comparison, are, in a most important sense, *present.* The interests of the soul are present interests, and its preparation for eternity a present duty. It is a work that can be done only now. Were the future independent of the present, and unaffected by it, there might be wisdom in the objection. But if it be true, that our spiritual state now is to determine our everlasting destinies; then are the paramount interests of eternity, in as far as regards the means of securing them, brought within the limits of time. If they are not secured now, they are lost for ever.

From all this I still conclude, that the unbelief, which springs from wilful inconsideration,—from a thoughtless preference of the engagements of this world, a preference which finds some secular claim upon every passing moment, and cannot disengage an instant for the soul and eternity, is stamped with guilt as well as with folly.

We must all, from experience, be conscious, that *indifference* is worse to bear than *opposition;*—that to be *slighted* is more offensive than to be *resisted.* That a proposal for the benefit of another, which has cost us the expenditure of thought and time, and property, should be argued against and disapproved, we may, with some little effort of self-government, contrive to bear:—but to have it treated as if it were not worth a hearing; to see the man for whose good we have been at so much pains, turn from us with unimpressible levity and indifference, and plead some worthless trifle as having a prior claim upon his attention and time!—I put it to every one of you, whether you would not feel this a more intolerable insult, than if your plan were to be heard, opposed, and rejected? O think, then, of the insult offered to the blessed God by the slighting indifference of his sinful

creatures;—an indifference which will not even listen to his proposals, but on every silly pretext that can suggest itself, turns away from him, and from all who would engage attention to him, even to trifles that, in the comparison, would not weigh the dust of the balance!—Is there no moral evil in this?—nothing for which the thoughtless and busy worldling can be justly called to account?

III. I come now, *in the third place* to consider the unbelief of PRIDE.

This general head divides itself, as I formerly noticed, into a variety of subordinate particulars. Even the two preceding topics of discourse might, perhaps, without impropriety, have been comprehended under it;—the one, as the pride of *self-will*, and the other, as the pride of *careless insubordination;* and thus all the sources of unbelief might have been reduced, as logicians express it, to one category.—But the descriptions of pride to which I *now* request your attention come more directly and naturally under this common designation. They are the pride of *wealth and station*, the pride of *wisdom*, and the pride of *self-righteousness*.

1. The pride of *wealth and station*.

Christianity fully recognises, and in no respect interferes with, the ordinary established distinctions of civil society: and they sadly mistake its nature, and betray great deficiency of sound judgment and discretion, who act as if it were otherwise; as if the faith and fellowship of the church of God obliterated the gradations of civil rank, and gave a dispensation from all the usually acknowledged proprieties of life.—But in regard to the provisions of the gospel, the Bible *does* place all upon a level. The salvation which it reveals is, in its nature, its

necessity, and its means, the same to all. There is one Bible, that teaches to all the same lessons; one salvation, for "high and low, rich and poor together." There are not two Saviours,—one for the rich and another for the poor. There are not two ways to heaven, the one for the rich and the other for the poor. There are not two tables spread and furnished, and two descriptions of fare provided;—there are not, in a word, two heavens, the one for the rich, and the other for the poor. In the "communion of saints," both below and above, "the rich and the poor meet together: the Lord is the maker," and the Lord is the *Saviour*, "of them all." Both as sinners, and as saved sinners, they stand on common ground. They are "all one in Christ Jesus." They enjoy the same privileges; they are possessors of the same honours; they acknowledge the same Father and the same Lord; they join in the same worship, the worship of one God, through one Mediator, by one Spirit; they are debtors to the same mercy, and look forward, on the same ground of hope, to the same everlasting inheritance. In the matter of salvation, from first to last, there is thus a *perfect equality*.

Now to many, this is offensive. Their pride rises at the thought of being placed on a level with the poorest and the meanest; of merging all their earthly distinctions, and joining with such in one fellowship, having blessings and privileges in common on the very same footing, children with them of the same family, and anticipating, on the same ground, the same heaven;—a heaven, where worldly dignities shall be no more,—where riches and birth confer no honour,—where, if they "sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob," they must at the same time sit down with Lazarus.—"God hath chosen the poor

of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him." Not a few among the rich and the noble, when they read or hear this, and see it realized, associate the religion of the gospel with the ideas of meanness and vulgarity, and the simple scriptural fellowship of a church of Christ with degradation, from which they shrink with a secret or avowed disdain. They like religion "in her silver slippers;"—when her observances can be made to accord with the pomps and fashions of the world; when she condescends to take them by the hand, according to their rank, and, instead of rudely stripping them of every badge of distinction, politely recognises the star and the coronet. They have no objections to the church, when they can be allowed, on entering it, to bring the world along with them.

But is there *no evil* in such feelings?—nothing criminal?—nothing offensive to God?—Is not this the very same temper of mind that discovered itself in the Jews, when they were disgusted at the meanness of the Saviour's birth, and condition, and outward appearance;—"the carpenter's son," instead of the royal leader of the armies of Israel, surrounded with the splendours of an earthly kingdom? In the language of the prophet, he "grew up before them as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he had no form nor comeliness, and when they saw him, there was no beauty that they should desire him: he was despised and rejected of men: they hid as it were their faces from him; he was despised, and they esteemed him not."—Is there no guilt, nothing morally wrong, in that state of mind, which allows the petty distinctions between fellow-creatures to shut out the remembrance of the infinite superiority of God?—a superiority, before which all these distinctions are "less than nothing

and vanity,"—the very thought of which should throw them all into forgetfulness;—as in nature, though "one star differeth from another star in glory," the whole hemisphere of twinkling lights retire from view before the splendours of the rising sun.—Is there no sin in the state of mind, which allows the imaginary degradation of connection with an inferior to outweigh the honour of being brought into fellowship with the infinite Jehovah? Is there no guilt in refusing the very highest dignity that God himself has to confer, because that dignity must be shared with those who are destitute of the paltry honours of this vain world? Is there no guilt in the dishonour thus put upon God by sentiments of him so low and unworthy—as if HE were to be influenced, in the bestowment of his blessings, by those little worthless differences that elevate one worm of the dust above his fellows!—Is there no guilt in slighting and disowning the offers of the "gospel of the grace of God" on such a ground?

There is, moreover, what the Bible denominates "the deceitfulness of riches." And so powerful are the seducing temptations included in the expression, that Christ himself has said, in language that may well startle the possessors of this world's abundance, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."—The language strongly intimates, how exceedingly prone the proprietors of riches are to trust in them;—to "make gold their hope, and say to the fine gold, thou art my confidence;"—to glory in their wealth as their "strong city," in the presumptuous spirit of self-sufficiency and self-dependence;—thus to forget the God who "maketh them to differ," and by whose munificent

hand their undeserved abundance is bestowed,—to fancy they can do well enough without religion,—to feel as if it were beneath them,—and to leave it to *the poor*, for whom, they grant, it may be suitable, and who stand in need of its supports and consolations. As for themselves, they do not require them.

Is there no guilt in this attachment to the world?—in ungratefully forgetting God, in proportion as he is liberal in his kindness?—in "forsaking the fountain of living water, and hewing out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water?"—in estimating religion, as if it were a matter of mere self-interest,—something to which a man may, if he please, have recourse, when his circumstances are felt to require it, but which otherwise he is under no obligation to mind?—Is not this spirit of worldliness the spirit of idolatry? Is it not substituting the creature for the Creator,—the gift for the giver,—the cause of gratitude for its infinitely worthy object? Is there not truth and reason in what Job says—"If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, thou art my confidence; if I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because my hand had gotten much;—I should have denied the God that is above?" And if it be by such a state of heart,—by such a worldly, such an atheistical spirit, that a man is kept back from accepting the proposals and embracing the offers of the gospel,—is not the unbelief criminal, and worthy of condemnation?—"How CAN ye believe," said Jesus to the Jews, "who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" The inability thus expressed is obviously and entirely *moral*. It is the inability of rooted and habitual worldliness to value and to relish spiritual blessings. It

is the inability of the want of right principle.—And what is true of the *honours* of the world, is equally true of its *riches:*—what is true of ambition is true of covetousness: and true, indeed, of every inordinate desire after earthly things. It was this that disinclined the Jews from "coming to Christ"—from accepting his doctrine, and submitting to his authority. He himself imputes it all to their want of will,—and that want of will to the absence of the principle of godliness:—"Ye WILL NOT come unto me, that ye might have life:"—"I know you, that ye HAVE NOT THE LOVE OF GOD in you."* This description of unbelief, then, might be designated the *unbelief of worldly-mindedness.* And I repeat the question, Is there no guilt in it?—no guilt in allowing the world, and the wealth and honours and distinctions of the world, to occupy the place of the blessings of God's salvation, and to steal away the heart from him who claims it as his own?

2. I now come to the *second* of the three descriptions of pride, namely—the *pride of wisdom.*

"Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."†—All along in the history of its progress, the gospel has been obnoxious to the contempt and ridicule of a vain philosophy—a "science falsely so called." It has encountered from this quarter more bitter virulence of despite than from any other. It was the scornful question of Athenian wisdom—"What will this babbler say?" and the question expresses the spirit of the "wisdom of the world" in all times and in all

* John v. 40, 42, 44. † Matth. xi. 25.

places. This wisdom, and the wisdom of God, are held forth as in perfect opposition and contrast:—"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.—Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching" (or by the preaching of foolishness) "to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men, after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in his presence."*—There is but little deference shown here, you perceive, to the wisdom of men. Its incompetency, in all that relates to the character and will of God, and the way of acceptance with him, is strongly affirmed; an

* 1 Cor. i. 18—29.

incompetency, ascertained by its notorious and utter failure on such subjects, after a trial of its powers for successive centuries and millenniums. Its unsuccessful researches, and fruitless labours, are held up even to scorn, in contrast with the light and energy and marvellous effects of that doctrine of the cross, which this very wisdom affected to pity as weakness, or to scoff at as folly.—So low an estimate of the powers of human reason in the things of God, by which all its lofty pretensions are so unceremoniously set aside, might itself be expected to offend not a little the indignant pride of the wise men of this world.

There are various other sources, too, to which in different degrees, according to peculiarities of constitutional or acquired character, the dislike, and consequent unbelief of these wise men may be traced.

1. The first I shall mention is, *the requisition of implicit faith.*

Those philosophers of whom I speak, possess, in more than ordinary energy, a principle common to them with all,—an aversion from having any thing *authoritatively prescribed* to them. They cannot bear to be *dictated to.* They like to exercise their own powers of invention and discovery; to have their own systems, their own distinguishing tenets, and their respective followers and admirers. They *must* have the liberty of *thinking for themselves.* And do not imagine that I am for denying them this liberty. It is right, that they, and that every man, should enjoy, and should use it. But still, if the Bible be once admitted to be the WORD OF GOD, it follows of necessity that it requires the submission of every mind to its dictates. Whatever it reveals must be received as truth: whatever it commands must be

practised as duty. This restrains the high-minded spirit of free-thinking. It represses the " airy wing" of a bold and lofty speculation. It sets down the philosopher at the feet of apostles and prophets, in the humble capacity of a learner and an asker of questions. For if these men really spoke and wrote " as they were moved by the Spirit of God," then the sole inquiry, in consulting their writings, must be, " What is the meaning of their words?" When that is ascertained, there can be no liberty left to take or to reject at pleasure,—to select what we may deem worthy of adoption, and to refuse what meets not our liking or approval. There can be no liberty to alter and amend, to add, or to diminish. The testimony of God must be taken *as it is*, —it must be received, in humble simplicity of mind, as he has given it. And this submission of the understanding to implicit and authoritative dictation, is a demand which the self-sufficient spirit of the wisdom of this world finds it especially difficult to brook—" It is a hard saying, who can hear it?"

2. A second cause of offence to the wise of this world, is, that the knowledge communicated by the gospel must be held by them in common with all,—with the most unphilosophical and illiterate,—the vulgar herd of ordinary men:—they must derive it from the same source, and must rest their faith of it on the same ground.

Those who are made " wise unto salvation" are " not many wise men after the flesh," any more than " many mighty, and many noble:"—and the philosopher is strongly tempted to nauseate a faith which is equally within the reach of all minds, and in the reception of which his own mind must be brought into association

with those of the common people—with many souls which

> ———proud Science never taught to stray
> Far as the solar walk or milky-way:—

He must believe as others believe; he must relinquish all pretensions to originality, and all attempts at improvement; he must have nothing which he can appropriate and call his own, and so distinguish himself from the crowd of simple, well-meaning believers.—There are few things, I am apt to think, for which the proud philosophy of this world has a more sensitively shrinking distaste, than common, vulgar, every-day opinions.

3. The representations given in the Bible, and especially in the testimony of the gospel, of *human nature*, as being utterly alienated from God,—in a state of enmity against him,—in the midst of whatever is amiable and honourable towards fellow-men, still manifesting this deep-seated spirit of ungodliness,—guilty, condemned, impotent, and hopeless;—and the views given too of the way of its recovery from this "low estate," by free mercy, through the merits, the sacrifice, and the mediation of another, to the entire exclusion of all self-dependence and self-glorying;—these views and representations are far from being such as can ever be palatable to the wisdom of this world. For of this wisdom, even in its moderate aberrations from the Bible, human nature is the idol, and human virtue the favourite theme. In the least exceptionable of its systems, human nature, in its present character, is assumed to be what the author of all created natures has been pleased to make it; and though unhappily, in this probationary state, alloyed with imperfections and frailties, and at times, through unfavour-

able circumstances and the force of temptation, giving place to even the excesses of evil, is yet exhibited as presenting a high average of goodness, and, in its innate dispositions and capabilities at least, bearing the impress of its Divine original. These prevailing sentiments of philosophy are at perfect variance with the statements of the Bible; so that, even when that sacred volume is spoken of with professions of respect, its most explicit declarations are, nevertheless, under various pretexts, softened down and explained away;—for, to understand them in their plain, unvarnished import, would be intolerably degrading, and unworthy of the real dignity of man.

4. Neither can it be supposed very congenial to the high spirit of this philosophy, for its ardent admirers to be told, that they cannot of themselves have a right understanding of "the things of God;"—that the most boasted powers fail here, without Divine illumination and aid;—that, amidst all their real candour and love of truth on other subjects, they are, like all other men, under the illusion of predominant prejudice upon these,—prejudice, which the Spirit of God alone can remove;—that there is a darkening film on the eye of their mind; and that they must come to the Divine Author of the Bible, to clear their mental sight of this obstruction, and to give them spiritual discernment of his truth.

Now, the question is, Are these things so? And if, in any case, they be so, do they constitute *a right state of mind?*—a state of mind that is free of moral culpability, and which exonerates unbelief from the charge in the text? On the contrary, is there not evil in all this pride of reason and of intellectual independence? Does it not belong to that "loftiness of man" which must be "bowed

down?"—Ought not men, circumstanced as they are, to be anxious to obtain, and delighted at receiving, a communication from God? And, having received it, is it not right that, with a deeply humble sense of inferiority and obligation, they should bow their minds to the acceptance of its dictates? Ought they not, moreover, to be more than satisfied, to be pleased and rejoiced, that this communication should be made equally to all,—not, in the style and matter of it, adapted for philosophers only, but suited to mankind at large, in their common character and universal exigencies?—that as the knowledge imparted equally concerns all, and all stand equally in need of it, it should not require the acumen and research of profound philosophy, to discover and bring it to light, but should be so written, as that "he that runs might read?"

Fancy not, that I object to the exercise of Reason in regard to religion. No. I only wish to assign it its proper province. The two questions to which Reason should apply her powers are simply, Whether the Scriptures be a revelation from God:—and, if they be, What they teach.—Now, I would ask, is the former of these inquiries what human philosophy *first and most solicitously seeks to ascertain?* Unquestionably it *ought* to be so. But *is* it so? Do philosophers in general bend their first attention to this point?—and do they come to the consideration of it with that simplicity and that solemnity of mind, which the subject alike demands;—their spirits loaded with the weight of an inquiry so momentous, and involving results of such unspeakable consequence; and humbly and sincerely resolved, if the professed revelation shall abide the test, to settle their faith, on all the matters of which it treats, according to its decisions,—terminating

their own speculations,—laying down their fancied and boasted discoveries at the feet of a Divine Instructor,—complying with the apostolic admonition, "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise,"—glad to find repose in the unerring testimony of heaven, from tossing on the troubled sea of conjecture and doubt? How rarely is such a course pursued by the wise men of the world! And one reason, it is to be feared, why the Divine authority of the Bible does not, as it ought, engage their first and most anxious inquiry, is the secret consciousness, that if it *do* possess such authority, it must bind them down,—it must command their assent,—it must destroy, as they conceive, their freedom of thought;—and they cannot bear this: they feel, in the native "vanity of their minds," a higher pleasure in roving at large on the sea of sceptical speculation, troubled as it is, and strewn with wrecks, than in the peaceful security of the harbour of faith.

Thus, as the poet expresses it,

> "In pride, in reas'ning pride, the error lies,
> All would be gods, and rush into the skies:"

and his words express no more than what might have been anticipated from the manner in which sin found its entrance into our world. It came in the form of *ambition*. It was insinuated into the soul, as a secret aspiring wish after interdicted knowledge,—a wish to have the tempting assurance verified, "Ye shall be AS GOD, knowing good and evil." The high-minded pretensions of human wisdom, its dissatisfaction with Divine communications, its confidence in its own powers, and attachment to its own discoveries, are in perfect harmony with this origin of our

apostasy, and may be reckoned among the indications of its truth.—Faith implies the distrust and renunciation of our own wisdom in "the things of God," and the entire submission of the mind to Divine teaching:—and the unbelief that springs from a state of mind opposite to this must be placed to the account of a pride of heart, such as God has declared he will hold at a distance. He "resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the lowly." "The proud he knoweth afar off."

3. The last of the three descriptions of pride to which I conceived unbelief might be traced, is the *pride of self-righteousness.*

This is a principle which exists in great force in human nature, and, although discovering itself under different modifications, is common to all. The statements of the Bible inform us, that while man continued in his original innocence, he held his happy life on the ground of his own obedience. This was the *divine appointment* concerning him. But when man had sinned, this state of things came to an end. A Saviour was then revealed; and a scheme of acceptance entirely new, adapted to his new situation and character. It then became, equally with the former, the *divine appointment*, that man, as a fallen creature, should seek and obtain life, on the ground of free mercy, through faith in that Saviour. From that time forward, the attempt to find life otherwise, by reverting to the original ground, and fancying again to deserve it, has been an act of presumptuous rebellion. It is *now*, as I formerly hinted, as much the *law* or *divine enactment*, that sinners shall be *saved by grace*, as it was *at first* that man should *live by his obedience;* and the desire or endeavour now to obtain life by our own right-

eousness, is as distinctly opposition to the declared will of God, as the eating of the forbidden fruit was.

But this is a view of the case which our proud nature does not like. There is in every bosom a clinging to self—a fondness for something of our own as our plea with God, and an extreme backwardness to relinquish our hold of it. The disposition manifests itself in an endless variety of ways, amongst all descriptions of character, from the highest example of worldly correctness, down to the veriest wretch that disgraces the society of a jail. All have their righteousness,—either some positive good, or some negation of evil, which, however little it recommends them to fellow-creatures, they flatter themselves may have its weight with God, to disarm his vengeance, and procure them some portion of favour. Such is the infatuating power of this principle, that the very last thing which a sinner can be induced to give up is this inveterate attachment to something in himself as his recommendation to God.

But all unbelief that arises from this source has in it, if there be truth in the Bible, the very spirit and essence of rebellion. Surely in the ear of every holy being, the *self-righteousness of a sinner* must sound as the very strangest possible anomaly and contradiction. It is the first duty of a sinner, instead of attempting self-justification, to confess his guilt, and plead for mercy; and with humility, and gratitude, and joy, to accept that mercy in the way in which his offended Maker has been graciously pleased to offer it. To spurn at this, is to add to the spirit of rebellion that of the foulest ingratitude. The justly offended Sovereign was under no obligation to provide means of recovery for sinful men. "He and his

throne would have been guiltless," had he left them to perish. Yet he has wrought in their behalf such wonders of mercy, as make us, by their very magnitude, incredulous of their reality.—From what the *power* of God *has done*, we infer that there is nothing but what involves a contradiction which it *cannot do*. As all the effects of creative power must necessarily be *finite*, we can have no proof but such an inferential one, of power that is *infinite*. But we have higher and more direct evidence of infinite *benevolence*. It has actually bestowed a gift of *infinite value:* for "God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life." This is a gift of which the worth can never be estimated; for it is truly and properly *divine:*—and the bestowment of it ought to draw from the inmost soul of every one who hears of it the simple but deep-felt utterance of apostolic praise—"Thanks be unto God for his UNSPEAKABLE GIFT!" Men profess to be charmed with the scripture assurance, that God "*delighteth in mercy:*" and yet, in rejecting the grace of the gospel, they reject the grand manifestation of the truth of this assurance; and, by their reliance on themselves, and their attempts to recommend themselves to God, and make out some claim upon him, by their own doings, they deprive the gospel of its very nature, as a revelation of mercy. Pure mercy is of its very essence: and, though, for securing the honour of divine justice, it is mercy through a Mediator, yet this does not render the mercy the less entirely gratuitous to the sinful creature. And he who will not consent to the utter renunciation of dependence on his own fancied merits, and to be a debtor to mercy alone, is in the full spirit of opposition to the God of the Gospel.

And is there, think you, no *evil* in that state of heart, that prevents a *sinful creature* from bowing his spirit to the mercy of his justly offended God?—that disposes him to spurn away the offers of sovereign grace, and refuse to be its debtor?—vainly to fancy that he can be his own Saviour, and make good his title to heaven?—Is it not right that a *sinner* should be a *suppliant?*—that his pride should be abased?—his high-mindedness laid in the dust?—that, instead of coming to God with the lofty port of the self-justifying Pharisee, he should come with the "broken and contrite spirit" of the publican, crying "God be merciful!"—not presenting a claim, but petitioning for a favour;—not appealing to justice, but imploring clemency? Is it not as it ought to be, when, before the spotless purity of that God who "is light, and in whom there is no darkness at all," he sees, and feels, and owns, every thing about himself to be defective and tainted, all unworthy the acceptance of such a being,—and when he throws himself at the footstool of the eternal throne,—the throne of the Divine holiness,—self-condemned, and pleading the name and the merits of the appointed Mediator?—Is not all this what really *becomes a sinner?* Is not this his proper posture, his proper temper, his proper petition, his proper plea? Ought not such a creature to take shame to himself, and to give God the glory? And must it not come from an "*evil heart,*" that such a creature *cannot bring himself* to the humiliation of an unconditional surrender? It is the very first thing to which a sinner *is* called,—(and is it not the very first thing to which he *ought* to be called?) to *submit to mercy.* The religion of a sinner must begin with this. It is the first right feeling in his heart towards the God with whom he has to do. If God has

revealed himself to sinners, the religion of sinners must regard him *as so revealed;* and if he is revealed as exercising free mercy, through the righteousness, atonement, and intercession of a Mediator,—then the first principle of religion in a sinner's bosom must be the acceptance of this mercy,—the humble acquiescence of the soul in the offers of unconditional grace. *All is radically wrong*, till he is brought to this. He is under the power of an evil heart,—of a high, self-willed, unsubmissive spirit,—than which, if we are to give credit to the Bible, there is no temper of mind more offensive to God.

And "*the deeds are evil*" that are performed in such a state of heart,—that are dictated by such a principle,—that have in them a spirit so utterly unbefitting a sinful creature, the spirit of *self-recommendation*. God must hold his place. The majesty of holiness unites, in his administration, with the condescensions of grace. His throne is the throne of purity, as well as of love. The acceptance of sinners, and their restoration to his favour, must be consistent with the claims of his righteousness, as well as with the dictates of his clemency. It must not be, that the infinite Jehovah compromise his honour, to gratify the wayward humour, and haughty self-sufficiency, of a sinful worm of the dust! It must not be, that God be disregarded, in order that man may be exalted!—that when He holds out the kind offer of unconditional mercy, and the indignant rebel refuses submission, he should change his counsels, relinquish his claims, and receive him on other terms! It must not be, that the sinning creature dictate to his Divine Sovereign the conditions of his own capitulation! It must not be, that the very principle of a rebel's apostasy be indulged and cherished by the method of his recovery,—and that

the jewels be wrenched from the crown of the Eternal to adorn the brow that scorned to bow itself to his footstool!—GRACE is what is offered:—grace is what alone *can* be offered:—and the sinner by whom grace is refused seals his own condemnation. The refusal comes from a proud, and therefore from an evil heart.

From the general position, that *all unbelief of the gospel has its origin in evil,* and from much of what has been said in the proof and illustration of it, many of you, I fear, may have set me down as exceedingly narrow-minded and uncharitable. I cannot help it. I must say, with Balaam, though I trust from a better principle, "I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord, to say less or more." I dare not indulge a charity for the sentiments and motives of infidelity,—for an unbelieving disregard and rejection of the gospel of Christ,—such as would contradict, or go beyond the testimony of that Book which I believe to be the Word of the SEARCHER OF HEARTS.—I am deeply conscious, that the natural tendencies of *my own* heart are in unison with the mortifying statements of that Book, and stand in constant need of a counteracting influence: and upon the verdict of the Divine record, confirmed by observation of mankind, I am satisfied that the natural tendencies of *all* hearts, however otherwise diversified, are in opposition to what is so authoritative, so humbling, and so holy:—and that, wherever these tendencies have been overcome,—where self-will has been subdued, where pride has been abased, where enmity has been softened, where corruption has given way to the self-evidencing power of the truth,—the happy effects have resulted from an influence more than human—even from the operation of that Divine Spirit,

of whom it was said by the Saviour himself, " When He is come, He will convince the world of sin, because they believe not on me."—But the nature and necessity of his work are topics which, however interesting and important, are beyond the limits (though bordering very closely upon them) of my present discussion.

I have before remarked, and now repeat the observation, that the confessions of all who have in earnest embraced the gospel, or, as the Apostle expresses it, " received the love of the truth, that they may be saved," are in harmony with the conclusion which we have been endeavouring to establish. Whatever may have been the varieties of their previous characters, they all unite in the humble and penitential acknowledgment, either that, during the period of their unbelief, the truth had been resisted by self-will, and pride, and enmity of heart, or that they had been deeply guilty, in their careless disregard and neglect of it. Whenever a sinner is brought to the true knowledge and faith of the gospel, he is filled with self-abasement and shame ;—he owns the criminality of his previous hostility or carelessness ;—and, deeply sensible that the difference between his former and his present self is to be ascribed to God—his heart swelling with the emotions of grateful love,—he says, with no affected lowliness, but in sincere prostration of spirit—" By the grace of God I am what I am !"

In a great congregation there is necessarily a great diversity of character and condition. There may be now hearing me more or fewer of all the descriptions of persons of whom I have been led to speak ;—the profligate, —the careless,—the rich,—the learned,—the self-righteous. We cannot enter into the heart of each individual, and directly apply the doctrine of God to his or her pe-

culiar views, and feelings, and tendencies. We must, in a great measure, " draw the bow at a venture." But the omniscient God can guide the arrow. And when we select a number of shafts from his quiver, he can direct each to the conscience and heart which it is especially fitted to pierce. With Him I leave the effect of all that has been said, in the persuasion of its consistency with his revealed will.

I know, at the same time, that I have been addressing myself to not a few, to whom it has been " given, in the behalf of Christ, to believe in his name;"—who have been convinced of their sinfulness, and guilt, and righteous condemnation, and have fled to the despised Saviour, as their only refuge, and their only hope.—Give the praise, my brethren, where it is due. To the grace of God you owe it, that you are not still " in the gall of bitterness, and bond of iniquity,"—" loving darkness rather than light,"—" without Christ and without hope."—Let a sense of your obligation make you anxious to show the practical influence of your faith. Let all your words, and all your actions, be brought to the test of that holy light which you have received. Formerly, you " came not to the light, lest your deeds should be reproved:" come now to the light, " that your deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God." Let the spirit of faith be the spirit of holiness and of love,—the spirit of practical godliness. In proportion to the simplicity and steadfastness of your faith, will be the stability of your peace, and the unreservedness and constancy of your obedience. By the unvarying exhibition in your conduct, of " whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good

report,"—of all that contains in it "any virtue or any praise,"—let your character present a practical refutation of all the aspersions that have been thrown upon that blessed truth, to which you now cling for the hope and happiness of eternity. Make it manifest that your faith "purifies your heart," "works by love," and is "the victory that overcometh the world:"—that "the Grace of God has brought you salvation," not merely by delivering you from the fears of hell, but by "teaching you to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly."—Many a time have you heard the hackneyed lines of the poet—

> "For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight;
> His can't be wrong, whose life is in the right."

—Now, foolish as every maxim must be, that disjoins practice from principle, and supposes the one to be right while the other is wrong; there is yet a sense in which the poet's words are true. Men are ever putting asunder what God has joined, and forming their estimates of *a right life* from partial and inadequate standards. But if we only understand the phrase with its proper comprehensiveness of meaning, it is certainly not far from the truth, that we may infer rectitude of faith from rectitude of life. If in a *right life* there be included, not only living "soberly and righteously," as these words are usually understood, but also "godly,"—not only "doing justly and loving mercy," but "walking humbly with our God,"—not only worldly virtue, but scriptural holiness:—if the life be *thus* right, it may be confidently concluded that the faith cannot be far wrong. But you must all be aware of the undefined vagueness in which the lines are understood by the vast majority of

those to whose lips, as expressing a favourite sentiment, they are most familiar. A right life is interpreted by such persons in ten thousand shades of meaning:—and neither having, nor desiring to have, correct conceptions of its nature, looseness and generality being much more convenient, they only mean, when they sport the quotation (for in general it is very lightly done) to express their contempt for all differences of mere opinion and belief, and, by the help of a well-sounding couplet and a plausible sentiment, to apologise for ignorance, and cover an aversion to serious inquiry.—But if *they* err in disjoining practice from faith, beware *ye* of the opposite and not less pernicious error, of disjoining faith from practice. If you do so disjoin it, be assured, your faith is mere profession:—you are believers only in name. For "what doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful for the body;—what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it have not works, is dead, being alone."—As, in the case from which the Apostle draws his comparison, we prefer the evidence of deeds to that of words, and pronounce the man a mere pretender to charity; so must we, in the case which the comparison is brought to illustrate, pronounce the fruitless professor,—the man who says he has faith, but has not works,—a mere pretender to faith. There is no charity in the one case; there is no faith in the other. Delude not your souls with such a "name to live." "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." Let the words of Christ himself,—words alike of warning and of en-

couragement, be deeply impressed upon your minds, and present always, with practical power, to your remembrance:—"Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it." *

May God the Spirit so carry home his own word, as effectually to convince of sin all who have not yet believed in Christ, as he is revealed in the testimony of the gospel! May he carry it home to the awakening of the *profligate*, of the *thoughtless*, of the *proud*,—of the "*rich* man, who glories in his riches; of the *mighty* man, who glories in his might; of the *wise* man, who glories in his wisdom;" of the *self-righteous* man, who glories in his virtue;—and bring them all, in their common character of SINNERS, to the foot of the cross, as suppliants for mercy!—The words of the text and context were uttered by the lips of the faithful and gracious Redeemer himself. They are alike characterized by the weight of authority, the fidelity of warning, and the persuasiveness of love. "Hear, and your souls shall live:"—"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so

* Matt. vii. 24—27.

loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

ON THE

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE HEATHEN.

SERMON I.

ROM. ii. 12, 16.

"*For as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law;—in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.*"

THERE is a subject, so closely connected with that of the discourses on man's responsibility for his belief that it may almost be regarded as a branch of it, on which very vague and unsettled conceptions are prevalent:—I mean the RESPONSIBILITY OF THE HEATHEN,—that is, of those immense multitudes of our fellow-men who are not in possession of the written revelation of God. Their situation, I need not say, is very different from ours. What difference, then, does this produce on their accountableness? *For what* are they answerable,—and *on what grounds?* Must there be, in their case, a change in the principles of judgment; or an accommodation only of the same principles to the variation of circumstances?

Many of my hearers are aware, that there are few ob-

jections against the Bible more frequently to be heard from the lips of infidels,—uttered sometimes with serious gravity, and at other times with the lightness of a sarcastic sneer,—than that *it damns the heathen.* Do you really believe, it is asked, in the tone of mingled surprise, derision, and anger,—Do you really believe, that all the heathen are to be left to perish eternally, because they never have had the opportunity of knowing what you call the gospel? And to give point and force to the sceptical question, we are usually presented with the names of a number of individuals, selected from Grecian and Roman story, who are esteemed as having been, in their day, the most eminent for science, and patriotism, and general virtue.—The objection is the more insinuating, because it wears the garb of humanity, and recommends itself to the feelings of benevolence;—so that the heart, instead of being startled by it, (as it can hardly fail to be by some other objections, which the inward monitor is sensible cannot be entirely cleared from the charge of a predisposing corruption)—is rather apt to take to itself a kind of self-complacent credit for entertaining it. There is no such secret revolting from it as must accompany objections of the other description. It presents itself, indeed, not under the aspect of humanity merely, but under the no less imposing one of equity. The statement, that the Bible does damn the heathen, being assumed as true, without examination, and in its unqualified terms, it is pronounced, with a rising emotion of self-approval in uttering the sentence, to be unjust as well as merciless to suppose such a thing!

You may have heard this objection, my hearers:—some of you, it is not improbable, may even yourselves have made it.—May I entreat, then, your serious atten-

tion to the observations I am now about to offer upon this deeply interesting subject. I say your *serious* attention:—for neither as it respects God, nor as it respects man, is it a matter to be treated with levity. And if you are disposed to be at all reasonable,—not lying at the catch, and not presumptuously expecting more than finite creatures are entitled to expect, I hope to be able to satisfy your judgments at least, that the objection is destitute of any solid foundation.—As to the influence of this conviction upon your hearts and characters, I must leave that with God, praying that He may graciously keep you from resisting it!

In endeavouring to ascertain the ground which the word of God warrants us to occupy on this important subject, I would begin by putting the question to an infidel, What he would consider as a fair and equitable principle, on which Deity should proceed in judging and pronouncing sentence upon his creatures? Would he say, Certainly that they should be judged and sentenced, according to the circumstances in which they have respectively been placed,—the advantages, on the one hand, which they have enjoyed, and the disadvantages, on the other, under which they have laboured? in a word, that responsibility should be according to privilege? Would *this* be regarded by him as a fair and equitable principle of judicial determination?—If it would, (and it is not easy to imagine how any one should refuse or question it)—then we are prepared to show, that this is the very principle, not only recognized in a tacit and indirect way, but most explicitly laid down, and frequently repeated, in various connections, and in the simplest possible terms, in the Bible.

To come at once to the text of our discourse. I can

conceive to myself nothing plainer:—"As many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law."

There are *two principles* distinctly and unequivocally recognised in these words, as the principles of Divine judgment.—The *first* is, that no human being, in any situation, under any variety of circumstances, shall "perish"—(that is, shall suffer future punishment in any of its various degrees)—except *for sin.* The perdition is associated with sin, and with sin only:—"as many as HAVE SINNED, shall PERISH." Every one, then, that does perish, perishes *on account of sin.*—The *second* is, that the *guilt of sin*, and consequently the *measure of its punishment*, will be estimated *according to the circumstances of those by whom it has been committed*,—according to their respective opportunities of knowledge both of duty itself and of the motives to the performance of it:—"as many as have SINNED WITHOUT LAW, shall PERISH WITHOUT LAW; and as many as have SINNED IN THE LAW, shall be JUDGED BY THE LAW."

Now, ought not this to be enough? If any are disposed to think that there should be no such thing as perdition or punishment *at all*, even on account of sin;—with such persons I have at present no argument. I must be allowed to assume it as a settled point in the Divine administration, that sin *ought* to be, and certainly *shall* be, visited with punishment. And supposing this assumed, the question is, can any reasonable objection be offered against either of the principles so clearly laid down in the text?

Nor is it in the text only that these principles are recognised. The spirit of them pervades the whole of the

sacred volume; and in many places of it they are affirmed with no less explicitness than in the words before us. For example: Luke xii. 47, 48. "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."—John ix. 39—41. "And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth."—John xv. 22—24. "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin. He that hateth me, hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father."—Matth. xi. 20—24. "Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works which

have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee."

From these and other passages, we lay it down, without hesitation, as the doctrine of scripture, as it is also the evident dictate of reason,—that responsibility is according to privilege,—that the punishment of offences by the judgment of a righteous God, will be exactly proportioned to the extent in which the means have been enjoyed of the knowledge both of duty and of the obligations to its performance.

The passages, as far as general principles are concerned, speak for themselves; and it is with general principles we have at present to do.—I pointed out, in a former discourse, the three requisites to responsibility which they evidently involve—namely, *capacity of understanding*, *opportunity of knowledge*, and *sufficiency of evidence*. I refer to what was then said on these points, without resuming the discussion of them. The additional principle now laid down is, that the *measure* of responsibility is the *degree* in which, in different cases, these three requisites actually exist.—A remark or two on one of the passages, on which no comment was formerly made, will set this in a clear light. It is Luke xii. 47, 48. The immediately preceding context sets forth largely and impressively the lesson, that *all* unfaithful servants shall be punished:—verses 42—46. "The Lord said," (in reply to a question of Peter) "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.

Of a truth I say unto you, That he will make him ruler over all that he hath. But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the men-servants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; the lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers."—Having thus taught the general lesson, that all unfaithful servants are to be punished, he proceeds, in the verses before quoted, to *modify* the intimation, showing his disciples that though *all* are to be punished, all are not to be punished *alike;* and that the difference of treatment is to be proportioned to the means possessed by the defaulter of the knowledge of his Master's will:—"And that servant who knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."

It may, moreover, be observed by the way, what a conclusive proof is thus afforded us, that the doctrine of *eternal* punishment is very far from being the doctrine of *equal* punishment. In what manner the infliction shall be variously proportioned to the guilt, it may be impossible for us to form any distinct conception: but it should be quite enough for us to be assured,—(and language could not give us a plainer assurance than this and other passages contain)—that such a proportion *there shall be.* Let no objection, therefore, to the scriptures be founded

on the contrary supposition; for it is a supposition which they unequivocally disavow.

The words of our text refer to the difference between the condition of the Gentiles and that of the Jews. The Jews had "the law,"—that is, the written law, or revelation of the Divine mind and will:—the Gentiles had it not. Were the Gentiles, then, to be judged according to a law which they were "without,"—which they did not at all possess? By no means. They were to be judged according to a light and a law which they actually enjoyed;—to the light of nature in the works of God around them, and to the law of nature in the dictates of conscience within them;—both at the same time (as we may show more fully afterwards) being taken in connection with traditionary revelation.—The Jews, on the contrary, having the law, and "sinning in the law," were to be "judged by the law;" that is, they were to be tried, sentenced, and punished, according to the terms of the Divine communications to them,—according to a clearer light, and a higher measure of obligation, than the Gentiles,—according to their privileges and advantages, and especially that most prominent and precious amongst them,—that "to them were committed the Oracles of God."—And is this not EQUITY?

If the Bible, my brethren, (as noticed in a former discourse) condemned men for their ignorance of what they never heard of,—for not receiving a revelation which they had no opportunity of knowing,—for not obeying a law which never was promulgated to them,—for failing to accept a message of mercy which never reached their ears;—the objection I am considering would be more than plausible; it would be valid,—it

would be insurmountable. It would be far more than difficult,—it would be utterly impossible, on any sound principles, "to vindicate the ways of God to men." The Book that contained such principles could not come from Him who is "a God of truth, and without iniquity."—But indeed it is not so. The representation is an impious slander on the Bible. No such principles of unrighteousness are any where to be found in it. And I would again put it to the conscience and the candour of any infidel, whether a fairer principle can be imagined than that which is laid down in the text and in the other passages that have been quoted? In conducting judgment on such a principle, does not the blessed God fully sustain the character which the same Book gives of him—"Just and right is He?" Sin he hates, and is determined to punish. He has published the determination. But he has, at the same time, assured us, that he will weigh in an even balance all extenuating as well as all aggravating circumstances, and pronounce his judicial sentences accordingly. —And what more than this can any reasonable man desire? So far from being a ground of objection and cavil, ought not the explicit recognition of such a principle, as the rule by which the Divine procedure is to be regulated, to recommend the Book which contains it, as giving just and worthy views of "the righteous Lord, who loveth righteousness?"

Will you presume to say, that God should make all men equal in point of privilege?—Let me beseech you to be cautious. Forget not that you are creatures. Beware of incurring the guilt of "charging God foolishly." Beware of the presumption of dictating to the Most High; and of applying to his vast and complicated administration the line of your limited and short-sighted wisdom. Be-

ware of arguing in the face of plain and palpable facts; and of expecting what there is nothing analogous in the entire system of his providential arrangements to justify you in looking for.

You profess it may be, to believe in the principles of *natural religion*. I will not attempt to puzzle you, by asking the question, What is it?—though of those who are accustomed to use the phrase, there are not a few whom it might perhaps perplex somewhat more than they are aware to furnish an enumeration of its articles. What I now wish to press upon you is, that you would apply to natural religion, whatever you conceive it to be, the principle of your objection against revelation. You refuse revelation, because the privilege is not universal; because the God from whom it professes to come has not rendered all men in this respect alike,—placing them all on an equal footing. Now, have you considered whether your favourite natural religion be not liable to the same objection? It is true, that everywhere there are manifestations of the being and perfections of God;—yet even these are, in different quarters of the globe, exceedingly various, both in kind, and number, and magnitude; and where, moreover, are the two individuals to be found, whom the Author of their being has made perfectly alike in their powers of discernment, and their opportunities of discovery and knowledge? Amongst mankind in general, indeed, in different ages and countries, the diversities, as you cannot but be aware, have been exceedingly wide.—The truth is, that if you refuse to accept the blessing of revelation because it is not common to all, you act in opposition to the entire analogy of providence. If you would have any just pretensions to consistency, you should proceed on the same principle in regard to other

favours of heaven; for "what hast thou that thou hast not received? And who is it that hath made thee to differ?" And if you do proceed on this principle, where is the blessing which you can possibly accept?—for where is the blessing that is equally distributed to all? You should throw your wealth into the sea, because there are poor men in the world; you should put out your eyes, because there are blind men in the world; you should decline the use of your understanding, because there are idiots in the world.

I do not mean to say, that the difficulties to be solved in regard to the unequal distribution of providential bounties, are the same in *degree* with those which arise from the partial and limited circulation of the discoveries of Divine truth. But they are the same in *kind*. The principle of both is one: and the same principle must yield the same conclusions in reference to conduct. The course which it justifies in the one case, it must justify also in the other.—Neither do I mean to say, that the limited extent of the diffusion of Divine revelation is not *mysterious*. I readily grant it to be so. The mystery is one which I confess myself unable to fathom. It stands next, in my mind, to that of the entrance of sin itself into the universe of a good and holy God. But the darkness which envelops this part of the Divine procedure is the same in its nature, though denser and deeper in its shade, with that which invests the whole administration of providence in the distribution of good and evil. Nor is the difficulty at all such as to discredit the scriptures as a revelation from God, or to disprove their heavenly origin, in despite of this obvious analogy of providence, and of all the accumulated and diversified evidences by which their authority and claims are ascertained.

Do mankind, allow me to ask, possess any *claim* upon God for the benefits of that knowledge which revelation unfolds? We cannot admit that they do. When he bestows this revelation upon any, he bestows a free favour: when he withholds it, he withholds what he was under no obligation to bestow. He might have withheld it from all, and withheld from all the Saviour whom it is its chief purpose to make known. He might have reversed the existing arrangement, withholding it from those on whom it has been bestowed, and bestowing it on those from whom it has been withheld.—Will any of you, then, be so self-sufficient and presumptuous, as to arraign the Sovereign of Heaven and Earth, and pass a sentence of condemnation upon his conduct, because he has not imparted to *all* a blessing to which *none* had a claim?—Will you venture to affirm, that it is impossible for God to have acted in *this* instance, as the most superficial notice of his providential procedure must satisfy you he is daily and hourly acting, in every thing else? Will you thus make your notions of propriety the test of the Divine government,—sit in judgment on the counsels of that infinite Being, "of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things," and dogmatically determine what it is right or wrong for Deity to do? Will you

> "Snatch from his hand the balance and the rod,
> Rejudge his justice,—be the God of God?"

—Be sober-minded. Are you satisfied of the truth that God *can do no unrighteousness in judgment?* If you be, —can you not, with this conviction, leave the Heathen in the hands of "the Judge of all the earth?" Are you really afraid that he will do them wrong?—that they will not get justice at his hands? Is this the extent of

your confidence in the Ruler and Judge of all?—And *will* it, I must again ask you, be wrong that he does them, if he acts towards them on the principles of the text?—if he judges them, as he here declares he will do, according to the circumstances in which they have been placed? You cannot, you dare not say so. A principle more thoroughly equitable, your own minds are incapable of conceiving. *

Suppose there were no Bible,—no Book professing to be a revelation of the mind of God.—Would this produce any difference on the state and responsibility of the Heathen? Obviously not. The only difference which

* "Nor is there," says Bishop Butler, "in all this, (namely, "'the varieties and supposed disadvantages of some in comparison "of others, respecting religion,') any thing shocking, or which "would seem to bear hard upon the moral administration in "Nature, if we would really keep in mind that every one shall be "dealt equitably with; instead of forgetting this, or explaining it "away after it is acknowledged in words. All shadow of injustice, "and indeed all harsh appearances, in this various economy of "providence, would be lost, if we would keep in mind, that every "merciful allowance will be made, and no more be required of any "one, than what might have been equitably expected of him, from "the circumstances in which he was placed; and not what might "have been expected, had he been placed in other circumstances: "that is, in scripture language, that every man shall be '*accepted "according to what he had, not according to what he had not.*' This, "however, doth not by any means imply that all persons' condition "here is equally advantageous with respect to futurity. And "Providence's designing to place some in greater darkness with "respect to religious knowledge, is no more a reason why they "should not endeavour to get out of that darkness, and others to "bring them out of it; than why ignorant and slow people, in "matters of other knowledge, should not endeavour to learn, or "should not be instructed."—*Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature, Part II. chap.* vi.

would have arisen from God's imparting no revelation, would have been the multiplication of the number of Heathens. *All* must have been Heathens. You yourselves must have been Heathens. For what are Heathens, but men who are destitute of Divine revelation? On this supposition, then, let me ask you, could you yourselves, speaking calmly and reasonably, have wished for your own assize any other principle of judicial decision than that you should be judged *according to your circumstances?* And if this would have been a righteous principle in application to *all*, had all been in the same condition, is it not equally righteous, when applied to whatever proportion of mankind remain in that condition?—The Divine reasons for their being allowed so to remain, are beyond your province. They are among the "secret things which belong to the Lord." But here is something "revealed" which "belongs to us and to our children." It is the *principle of the Divine judgment.* And it is impossible that any thing could be more simple and satisfactory.

Let us, for a moment, set revelation aside, and, without adverting to the *cause* of the difference in knowledge between us and others, consider that difference simply as *a point of fact.* Whether that Book which we call by way of eminence THE BIBLE, be a revelation from God or not, it is matter of fact, whencesoever the information may be supposed to have come, that we are actually in possession of the knowledge of the only true God, in opposition to all the fooleries of polytheistic superstition. From whatever source, and by whatever channel, this superior knowledge has reached us, such, in the providence of God, is the indisputable *fact.* There *is* this difference between us and others.—Now, do infidels ever

think of rejecting or questioning this knowledge, on the simple ground that *all* do not possess it? If they admit at all the doctrine of a superintending providence, (and they might as well avow atheism at once if they do not) they cannot deny, that, in whatever way the difference has been brought about, it is GOD that has "made them to differ." Let them reject revelation, and impute the difference to other causes,—still it is a part of his arrangement:—it is as much *his* doing, in the sovereign counsels of his government, *as if* it had arisen from revelation. There is, therefore, the very same reasonableness in refusing the knowledge in the one case, because all do not actually possess it, as there is in the other. No matter, in this respect, whether they ascribe the difference to revelation or to natural reason; in either case, it is God's doing; and in either case the question presents itself, Why has not the Supreme Ruler given to all the same means of knowledge, and rendered these means in all cases alike efficacious? The *fact* of the difference exists;—it exists under an over-ruling providence, which *could* have produced universal equality;—here is knowledge which *we have*, and which *others want;* and, in whatever way it has come into our possession, there is the same responsibility for the use of it.

Be serious, my friends,—and be candid and impartial. Are the peculiar blessings of revelation the *only* description of blessings which infidels decline accepting, because they are not universal in their diffusion? If they be, then be assured, there must be some other reason by which they are influenced in the refusal of them, than the one they thus allege. There must be something which they do not like in the nature of the blessings themselves, or in the terms on which the bestowment of them is offered,

and their acceptance required. If other favours are received and enjoyed without the interference of any such scruple, can the suspicion which I have thus expressed be fairly considered as involving any breach of Christian charity? I leave the question to the decision of their own consciences.

I have thus endeavoured to show you the *principles*, according to which, the Scriptures assure us, the judgments of the Divine Tribunal are to be conducted. And I wish to impress it strongly on your minds, that beyond the *ascertaining of principles* it is not ours to go. We dare not attempt it. If you ask me to *apply* these principles, I am silent, and resolute in silence. This is beyond our legitimate province. It would be an arrogant and impious assumption of a prerogative exclusively divine. If you begin, therefore, to *name individuals*, and to press me with inquiries what is to become of *them*—I have but one reply:—You are going beyond your limits. You are not the judges. You know not enough of the cases and the characters,—not even of any one case or character,—to fit you for such decision. It is enough for you to be assured of the *principles of judgment*, and of the application of these principles being in the hands of an omniscient, unerring, independent, and impartial Judge. *There* you must leave all questions as to individuals. "The Judge of all the earth will do only that which is right." No one, you may surely rest satisfied, shall find any ground of complaint at the Tribunal of "the Holy One and the Just." Is the amount of your confidence in God (I again ask you) so very small, that you cannot trust him for this? —that you will not be satisfied with the explicit declaration of principles, but will insist on his disclosing to

you the results of their application to individual characters, or on his endowing you with omniscience, to enable you to make this application yourselves?

But a heavy load, I will suppose, after all that has been said, still presses upon your minds; you still urge the anxious inquiry—*But may not the Heathen be saved? Is their salvation, without the knowledge of revelation, impossible? Is there no hope for them?*

I have no wish to dismiss such questions lightly. It would show a want of all becoming sensibility, not to participate in the solicitude which they express. In attempting any reply to them, I must begin by inquiring, —What do you mean when you ask, "May not the heathen be saved?"—There is a vagueness in the question, of which, possibly you are not sensible.—When you say, May not the heathen be saved?—do you mean to ask whether *all* the heathen may be saved, whatever have been their principles, and whatever their character? I will not suppose you can mean this. It would be an insult to your good sense. The doctrine that would make salvation independent of present principles and present character in the case of the *heathen*, must of necessity, (if those who maintain it would be consistent with themselves) make salvation independent of principles and character as to *all mankind*. And with a doctrine such as this,—if any shall be found so foolish and so presumptuous as to entertain it,—we have at present nothing to do.

Again, then, I ask—Do you mean by the question, whether, if a heathen can be found, who has thought, and felt, and acted, fully up to the light which he has enjoyed,—who has in every thing lived agreeably to that light, whatever the measure of it may have been,—

whether *that* heathen may be saved?—then I answer, without the hesitation of a moment, YES—*most assuredly*. The text clearly implies it. We know that if those who *had* the law *kept the law perfectly*, then they would have been saved by it; for the scripture expressly saith, "The man that doeth these things shall live by them." Such persons would have been *sinless* in *their* circumstances;—and if any one of those who are "*without law*" were found *sinless* in *his* circumstances, *he* could not perish; for the text lays down the principle, that it is only *such as have sinned*, in whatever circumstances, that shall perish. It clearly follows, that if a heathen be found, who has, in all respects, lived according to the light he has enjoyed, he shall *not* perish. Point out the man, and we have divine authority for pronouncing him safe. The doctrine of the text is, that he is to be judged according to his circumstances,—"according to what he *hath*, and not according to what he *hath not:*"—in the case supposed, he comes up to this test:—he cannot, therefore, be condemned,—he cannot perish.

But there is still another question:—Even those who believe the gospel are not by the faith of it perfectly freed from sin; they are only delivered from its predominant power, from the love and the indulgence of it; so that, with various degrees of remaining corruption, *prevailing holiness* becomes their distinguishing character:—is your meaning, then, whether, if a heathen were to be found, understanding and believing those views of God which nature teaches,—humbly and seriously feeling their influence,—and living accordingly,—not a life, as in the former supposition, of *sinless* conformity to his principles, but, as in the case of the christian believer, a

life of such predominant goodness as the lessons which he actually has, the truths which he has learned from the volume of nature, are fitted to produce;—whether, if such a man were found, he might not be saved?—I freely answer, *I am not prepared to deny that he might.* And if any shall think these terms, in such a case, unduly cautious and measured,—I will go a step further, and say, the *spirit* of the text appears to imply, if its words do not directly express, a principle that would warrant our answering *this* question too in the *affirmative.*—Divine instruction is contained, if I may so express myself, *in two volumes,*—the volume of *nature,* and the volume of *revelation.* The text expressly declares,—what accords with the dictates of reason and with every natural sentiment of justice,—that they who are not in possession of the latter are not to be judged by it. If, therefore, any one can be found, who learns aright what is taught in *the only volume he has,* and who is rightly and habitually, though not perfectly, *influenced by what he learns,*—(for to insist on the *perfection* of such influence would, as I have just before noticed, be to require more than is required in the case of the believer of the lessons of the *other* volume, the volume of revelation)—I see not, in such a case, how either the spirit or the letter of my text could justify me in affirming his condemnation;—for then, in opposition to what the text so plainly teaches us, his sentence would proceed on the ground of his *not being influenced* by what he had *no opportunity to know.*

In granting, however, this general position, I must request the special attention of my hearers, to the following observations, as its necessary qualifying accompaniments:—

In the first place: I repeat, as of particular consequence to be borne in mind, I am only *laying down principles.* With the *personal application* of these principles I have nothing to do. That, as I have said, must rest in a higher quarter,—in the hands of the only competent Judge. In my present reasonings, all is hypothetical. *If* such a person is to be found, we may entertain good hopes of his future well-being.

Secondly: The supposition of such a person's salvation is not by any means to the exclusion, in the hypothetical case, of either the *influences of the Spirit of God,* or the *virtue of the Redeemer's atonement.*—With regard to the former; since both the volume of nature and the volume of revelation are divine, there is surely nothing either inconceivable or incongruous in the idea of the Holy Spirit operating on the minds of men by the truths contained in the one, as well as by those contained in the other. The truths indeed of the former volume are truths which are assumed and repeated in the latter,—although the principal lessons of the latter are discoveries peculiar to itself, beyond those of the former, and far transcending them in interest and glory. But still, the Spirit of God may, without the slightest inconsistency or disparagement, be conceived to impart his influence for giving the right discernment and the proper efficacy of those lessons that are *common* to nature and revelation, as well as of those which are *peculiar* to the latter. When the New Testament Dispensation is distinguished as the "ministration of the Spirit,"—and when such language is used as, "the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified,"—we are not to understand, that there was *no Divine influence* previous to the fulness of time and the clear discoveries

of the gospel; but only that, under the gospel, the *degree* of that influence was to be so extraordinary and unprecedented, as to form a distinctive characteristic of the new era. Both the miraculous power and saving energy of the Spirit were in requisition from the beginning, for giving evidence and efficacy to the truth of God. But when Christ had finished his work,—when he "ascended on high leading captivity captive, and received gifts for men," the effusion was beyond all example abundant in its measure, and glorious in its effects.—On the same principle, when we speak of the Spirit operating by the truths of revelation, it might be meant, not that his operation was *exclusively* or *without exception* by their instrumentality, but only in a degree, and with a frequency so transcendently superior, as to be fairly and strikingly distinctive and characteristic. The truths taught by nature are also taught by revelation: and the question is, whether, as taught by nature, that is, by themselves, unconnected with the peculiar discoveries of the inspired volume, God has ever been pleased to honour them with the accompaniment of his Spirit, and so to make them the instrumental means of spiritual benefit to the souls of men. And on this question I would by no means venture to affirm any thing with confidence. Whilst the supposition involves nothing either impossible or unworthy of the Divine Agent,—yet it may be regarded as at least dubious in point of fact, whether the Spirit ever does make use of the truths taught by the light of nature alone, for renewing hearts, and bringing erring men back to God. When the apostle says,—"After that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe," his language certainly

favours the contrary supposition. It seems to intimate, that it was God's design, to give a full and fair trial to the unassisted powers of human reason. And the trial, during the whole period of it, and over all the extent of its field, having issued in a total failure, then he comes forward with his new instrument, the peculiar discoveries of the gospel, the doctrines of the cross. These he accompanies with his spiritual agency, and proves them to be, though foolishness in the eyes of the wise men of this world, "the power of God unto salvation."—Still, however, on the principles above mentioned, this and similar passages might signify not the *absolute exclusion*, but only the *very great rarity*, of divine influence accompanying the truths in the volume of nature. I do not think that inspired authority pronounces any unqualified decision of the question.

With regard again to the atonement of Christ, the question comes to be, whether there be any impossibility or contradiction in the supposition of its saving virtue extending to any who are necessarily ignorant of it? I hold it as a scriptural principle, in regard to our apostate world, that "there is *no salvation in any other*" than the revealed Mediator; and that all consequently who *are* finally saved must owe their salvation to his atonement and intercession. The whole countless multitude of the redeemed shall sing one song—"Salvation to our God who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb!" Personal worthiness, and self-salvation, will have no place in the thoughts of any one mind in that vast assembly. "CHRIST will be all, and in all." But the question is, whether the merits of Christ can, in any case, extend, in their saving virtue, beyond the actual knowledge of him? And in answer to this question,

the case of *infants* immediately presents itself. We believe the mediation of Christ to be available to *their* salvation, although they are incapable of knowing, understanding, and believing the divine testimony. There is a close parallelism between their case and that of the Heathen;—the sole difference being, that in the one the ignorance arises from *incapacity*, and in the other from *situation;* and these, where the situation is not the result of choice, are, in all that affects moral responsibility, evidently on a level.

Still, however, let it not be forgotten, all this is *hypothetical.* Of particular facts, or of the salvation of individuals, we can affirm nothing. We only say—*If—if* such persons *have* existed, or *do* exist.

I recur to the general position, that the *principle of judgment* laid down in the text is that of perfect unimpeachable equity, and repeat my appeal for this to the understanding and conscience of every hearer. If you are satisfied of the rectitude of the principle, leave the Heathen (for surely you may do so with confidence) in the hands of that Supreme Judge, who has announced this as the unalterable law of his procedure, and who, in its impartial application, will do none of his creatures wrong. Be thankful for the discovery of the principle, and intrust the application of it to him. To such confidence he is entitled. It is fearful impiety to withhold it.

Having offered these observations on the *principles of judgment*, which the Bible assures us are to be applied to the Heathen, I shall now enter a little into the *facts* of their case, and endeavour to show you what the doctrine of the same Book is, with regard to the light which they enjoy, the use they have made of that light in the dis-

covery of truth and duty, their actual character, and their true condition and prospects. Into this interesting subject the apostle Paul enters, with the comprehensive brevity and dignified authority of inspiration, in the latter half of the preceding chapter, and in the context of the words which form the subject of our present discourse: and I know not how I can accomplish my own end better, than by an expository illustration of his statements and reasonings;—subjoining such practical lessons as may be suggested by the entire discussion.—It is not my intention, however, to enter largely into the various topics, which are, either directly or collaterally, brought before us by the passages referred to; but to confine myself to such observations as bear more immediately on the subject of our present consideration—the *grounds of Heathen responsibility*.

In the reasoning which commences at the 18th verse of the first chapter, and is carried on to the 19th verse of the third, the apostle argues a point of a still more general nature than that with which we are at present engaged;—his object being to prove, as he states in chap. iii. 9. that "both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin." His proofs of this fundamental position, are drawn from a detail of *facts* in the history and character of both; and then the conclusion to which these conduct him is corroborated, for the conviction of the Jews—to show them that it was no new doctrine, but one explicitly recognized in their own scriptures—by an appeal to those scriptures of which they acknowledged the Divine authority. It is with that branch only of his proof which relates to the Gentiles, or Heathen, that we are at present concerned.

Having declared in the 16th and 17th verses of the preceding chapter, the reason why he was "not ashamed

of the gospel of Christ," namely, its being "the power of God unto salvation,"—adapted at once to the perfections and claims of Deity, and to the character and exigencies of human nature, and proving itself efficacious, when all the devices of man's wisdom had, after long and varied trial, turned out abortive and fruitless;—the apostle proceeds to show the grounds on which the necessity of this salvation rested:—"For the wrath of God," says he, (verse 18th,) "is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness."

I dwell not on that fearful expression—"the wrath of God."—It is not a phrase without meaning—to which there exists no corresponding reality. The use of it in his own word assures us beyond controversy, that there *is* such a thing; for "it is impossible for God to lie,"—to convey false impressions to the minds of his creatures, or alarm them with groundless fears. There *is* such a thing; and in many parts of scripture it is represented as unspeakably awful. How, indeed, can it be otherwise? It is the wrath of a *holy* God, whose hatred of sin is infinite;—of a *just* God, who cannot but punish it according to its real demerit;—of an *omniscient* God, whose all-seeing eye no act, no word, no thought of evil can escape;—of an *almighty* God, whose power to punish no creature can resist;—of a *merciful* God, whose offered and slighted grace will at once aggravate and justify his vengeance;—and of an *immutable* God, whose hatred of sin can never cease to be infinite, whose righteousness no bribery can corrupt, whose knowledge no forgetfulness can impair, and whose power no lapse of time can weaken. "Who knoweth the power of thine anger!"

Of the displeasure of God against the sins of men, very

early intimations were given; and of these intimations, the remembrance was kept alive by the secret voice of conscience, by the infliction of threatened judgments and all the variety of human suffering, and by the institution of animal sacrifices, which appears to have taken place immediately after the fall, and which was subsequently established, in greater extent and variety, in the system of typical rites amongst the chosen people. In other nations of the world, this singular institution came to be miserably perverted from its true meaning and design;—and neither it, nor the admonitions of conscience, nor the traditional memory of original threatenings, nor the merited corrections of offended Heaven, were sufficient to withstand, or even in any considerable degree to check, the dreadful power of moral corruption, which hardened the hearts, and blinded the understandings of men.—"The times of this ignorance," says Paul before the Athenian Areopagus, "God winked at, but *now* commandeth all men every-where to repent." In the passage before us, he probably refers to the same period. "The wrath of God," of which from the beginning there had been intimations, "is *now* revealed,"—clearly and fully revealed, —"against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men;" —that is, against all their impiety towards God, and all their wickedness towards one another,—the violations, in heart and in conduct, of that love which is due, respectively, to both.

To the expression, "who hold the truth in unrighteousness," various senses have been affixed. On these it would be foreign to my purpose to comment, with the view of balancing their respective claims to preference. To myself it appears most naturally, and most consistently with the context and the general aim of the apostle's

reasoning, to signify, that under the influence of unrighteousness, they *restrained* or *held back* the truth (according to what seems to be the precise import of the original term) from exerting its proper influence. They laid it, as it were under arrest, because its imperative dictates were such as opposed the inclinations of their depraved hearts. It is not merely that they *kept the truth to themselves*—holding it in concealment and captivity, and instead of disclosing to others what they knew, criminally leaving them in error and delusion;—which some of the philosophers have justly been charged with doing, in regard to the unity and other attributes of the Divine nature:—but more generally, that both philosophers and others *refused to frame their lives, even according to such knowledge of truth as they actually possessed, or had the ready means of attaining.* They acted towards the truth, in voluntarily resisting its control, and shackling its freedom, as a foolish and unprincipled king does towards his best and wisest counsellor, when he throws him into prison, to have him out of the way, resenting his past fidelity, and determined no longer to be troubled with his salutary but unpalatable admonitions.*

* The phrase in the original is τῶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐν ἀδικίᾳ κατεχόντων. And in the sense which I have affixed to it, I find myself supported by several writers of eminence. The following explanations are substantially the same.

"*Who restrain the truth in unrighteousness*, when that heaven-born captive would exert its energy upon their minds, and urge them to obey its dictates."—*Doddridge.*

"Qui officium erga Deum et erga alios non neglexerunt solum, verum etiam qui veritatem et sensum officii, quod tum conscientia ex lumine rationis, tum scripta Mosis et prophetarum, tum imprimis doctrina evangelii clarissime docebat, extinguere sunt ausi, instar tyrannorum qui subditos injuste terrent, vincunt, atque opprimunt."—*Wetstein.*

This interpretation of the words is in evident harmony with the tenor of the subsequent reasoning:—verses 19, 20. "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."

It has been made a question by some, whether mankind would ever have arrived at any right notions of God, nay, whether they would ever have formed even the idea of his existence, from the works of creation alone, apart from original revelation. The inquiry is one which affords room for much ingenious speculation on both sides; but one, at the same time, which is incapable, I

"They are said to retain the truth in unrighteousness, by acting contrary to the notions of it they had or might have learned from the law of nature, and by suppressing or corrupting the dictates of their natural conscience."—*Whitby.*

"Who live not up to the light that God has given them:"—Who are not wholly without the truth, but yet do not follow what they have of it, but live contrary to that truth they do know, or neglect to know what they might. This is evident from the next words; and from the same reason of God's wrath being given, chap. ii. 8. in these words, "Who do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness."—*Locke.*

To what Mr. Locke says about its agreement with the phraseology of chap. ii. 8. it may be added, that it corresponds equally well with that of the closing verse of chap. i. "Who knowing the judgment of God that they who commit such things are worthy of death; not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."—Views somewhat different are given by Schleusner, Wakefield, Calvin, M'Knight, and others. But none of them seem to me to accord so well with the context:—and I cannot but think those interpretations particularly exceptionable that confine the meaning to the *philosophers* of the Gentile world. It appears to me evidently more general in its intended application.

apprehend, of being satisfactorily determined;—because we have no certainly ascertained facts on the subject, nor indeed, from the nature of the case, ever can obtain them; there being no people, amongst whom the notions, whatever they may be that *do* exist, may not, in whole or in part, be the sadly corrupted remnants of primitive tradition.

I take it for granted, that the true knowledge of God was originally possessed by man; that when created, with a rational nature, for the enjoyment of happiness, and for the glory of his Maker, he was made acquainted with the existence, character, and will of that Being whose dependent and accountable creature he became. The supposition of the contrary is as inconsistent with sound reason, as it is with the explicit statements of revelation. And with this original knowledge the idea of subsequent tradition is inseparably associated; for, on no supposition short of the immediate extinction of the race, could the knowledge thus communicated, be totally lost at once.

To this *original knowledge*,—which, we learn with certainty from the sacred records, existed in the family of the second great progenitor of the human race, although not in the perfection in which it was possessed by man in innocence,—the apostle I am inclined to think, refers in the nineteenth verse, when he says, "That which *may be known* of God is manifest in" (or among, or to) "them." Such is our English translation. But the expression in the Greek more literally signifies—"That which *was known* of God is manifest among them."* The intima-

* Τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ. I do not mean that τὸ γνωστὸν is not susceptible of the meaning "that which *may be* known;" for verbals of this description do sometimes correspond in signification to the Latin verbals in *-ilis*, denoting ability or capability:—but only that the

tions originally given of the invisible things of God have been continued before the very senses of men. Not only did God at first communicate the truth concerning himself directly to the human mind, but he also made it visible to every eye, in all the works of his hands, in every age, and in every country; not only did he write his name on the mind of his favoured creature, when he "made him a living soul," but he inscribed it in letters of light, on every part of creation. And when that creature apostatized, and became a rebel, he did not remove from before his eyes, or the eyes of his posterity, the traces, or rather the clear and numberless displays of his existence and perfections. On the contrary, the whole of surrounding nature continued to bear its silent but impressive testimony to the wise and good and mighty Creator. "The heavens still declared his glory," the earth, and sea, and air, were still "full of his riches." It was but opening the eye and the ear to the sights and sounds of nature,—and all was full of God.

The apostle, as I conceive, connects these two things

sense I have attached to it is its more direct and literal signification. "4. Τὸ γνωστὸν, cognitio, scientia, i. q. γνωσις, quo ipso vocabulo usi sunt Chrysost. et Theodoret. explicationis causa ad locum, Rom. i. 19. διότι τὸ γνωστὸν τῶν Θεοῦ φανερόν ἐστιν ἐν αὐτοῖς, quanquam vero *habent cognitionem de Deo ab ipso Deo ipsis suppeditatam.*" *Schleusner.* —I do not say that by this last expression either Schleusner, or the fathers to whom he refers, meant the knowledge of God *originally imparted to man;* they might perhaps mean the knowledge (that is the lessons) taught in the works of his hands. I quote the passage only to show the proper meaning of γνωστὸν; which is certainly capable of being referred, and which, it seems to me, ought to be referred, to the knowledge of God actually communicated by original revelation, and subsequently continued as a lesson in all the clear manifestations of nature; but though originally possessed, afterwards awfully lost, all these continued manifestations notwithstanding.

together,—namely, *the possession of original knowledge*, and *the continued manifestation of the truth in the whole of creation*:—and it is from the two thus connected that he draws his conclusion,—"*So that they are without excuse.*"—When he affirms that "since the creation of the world the invisible things of God, even his eternal power and godhead, *are clearly seen, being understood* from the things that are made,"—he surely cannot be conceived to mean, that, in point of fact, these things have all along from the beginning been actually discerned and understood by mankind. This would be palpably inconsistent with truth, and contradictory to his own subsequent statements. The meaning is, that in the works of creation there have always been exhibited such proofs of the Divine existence and perfections as were amply sufficient for keeping men in mind of these important truths;—amply sufficient even by themselves, and still more so when taken in connection with original traditionary information, to be the basis of his condemnatory sentence.—And indeed, the two considerations, when thus taken together, do impart a special conclusiveness and energy to the inference:—"They are without excuse; because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things."

In these verses, the apostle states *matter of fact*, both with regard to the knowledge originally possessed, and with regard to the use made of it by mankind, or rather

their abuse, corruption, and loss of it.—Let us consider the facts of the case, that we may duly perceive the grounds of inexcusableness.

"*When they knew God, they glorified him not as God.*"—The words are sometimes explained, as if they meant merely that men *might have known* God,—that they possessed the means of knowing him, by the proper employment of their rational powers, in the contemplation of his wonderful works. But this is not their literal import, nor their full amount. Literally rendered, the words are,—"Because that, *knowing God*,* they glorified him not as God;" and they mean what they literally affirm, that men *really knew God*, having been originally acquainted with his existence and perfections, as well as subsequently reminded of what they knew by all the works of God around them.

Though they thus knew God, "they glorified him not as God." They did not continue to render to him the honour that was his due, to cherish towards him those devout tempers of mind which became his creatures, or to express the sentiments of devotion in worship befitting his nature and character.—They forgot his *unity*, and gave him not exclusive adoration;—they lost sight of his *spirituality*, and, instead of "worshipping him in spirit and in truth," imagined him to be gratified with what pleased the sensual appetites of corporeal beings;—the impression of his infinite though unseen *majesty*,—the majesty of eternity, immensity, omniscience and omnipotence,—being effaced from their minds, their homage was no longer that of "reverence and godly fear;"—and, letting slip the remembrance of his infinite

* Διοτι γνοντες τον Θεον.

and irreconcilable *separation from all evil*, they served the God of light with the works of darkness,—" the Holy One" with the mysteries of impurity.

" *Neither were they thankful.*" They felt not the obligations of gratitude for the multiplied favours of that God, whose goodness they originally knew, and who continued to load them with his benefits;—who " left not himself without witness, in that he did them good, giving them rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness." They ascribed not the praise of their unnumbered blessings where it was supremely due, but either took the credit to themselves, gave the honour to their fellow-creatures, or returned their thanks to gods, falsely so called; imaginary deities, the creation of their own deluded fancy.

Further:—" *They became vain in their imaginations*, and their foolish heart was darkened."

The word translated " *imaginations*," means more properly " *reasonings*."—The original knowledge was right; and all the results of human reasonings on the subject have been deteriorations of it,—departures from truth. Instead of there being in human nature, as philosophers insist, a tendency on this subject from ignorance to knowledge, the tendency has, in point of fact, been the very reverse,—a tendency from knowledge to ignorance,—from right to wrong. It was when men, having credited the devil's lie, vainly fancied that it had been verified, and that they had become " AS GOD, knowing good and evil;"—it was then that the proud " age of reason" commenced: and it was then, that " *professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.*" Instead of attaining to increased illumination, " *their foolish heart was darkened.*" The

more they reasoned, in the lofty pride of independent wisdom, the further and the further did they depart from the purity and excellence of the knowledge that had been originally communicated to them; and the remark of an infidel writer was exemplified, that all is faultless as it comes from God, and all debased and corrupted as it passes through the hands of men. "The nearer," says a deservedly popular writer, "we approach to Noah, the nearer we invariably come to the pure and perfect character, the unperplexed knowledge, and the unblemished worship of Jehovah. The further we recede from this patriarch, the deeper we find ourselves regularly sinking in the abyss of polytheism. Were the unity and perfections of God inferred by reason from the works of creation and providence, this progress would of course be inverted. The traditionary state would be the state of obscurity, imperfection, and error, because then men reasoned less, and believed on authority more. As philosophy advanced, and investigations multiplied,—as the subject was more frequently taken up in form, and professedly discussed; the proofs of the unity and perfections of God would be accumulated, and the knowledge of this great subject rendered more clear, certain, and unobjectionable. The fact, however, has been uniformly contrary to this representation. As tradition has declined, this knowledge has declined with it. As it has been corrupted, the knowledge has been corrupted: where it has been lost, the knowledge has been also lost."*

In the midst of all their boasted wisdom, the folly of men quickly displayed itself in the views and practices

* Dwight's Theology, Serm. IV.

to which that wisdom gave rise:—"They changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things."—"They changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more (or rather) than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen."

I dwell not at present on the varieties of idolatrous worship—of human, and animal, and vegetable deities, which, in different ages and countries, have been the objects of the veneration of mankind;—the contemplation of which cannot fail to impress on every intelligent mind a sad and mortifying conviction of the weakness and infatuation of the understanding that gives itself up to such delusions; to awaken in every benevolent heart a lively emotion of pity for the victims of such wretched delusions; and to swell every pious bosom with an inexpressible feeling of mingled indignation and shame for the dishonour thus done to the incorruptible God.

"They changed the truth of God," says the apostle, "into a lie." They exchanged the true knowledge of God, which they originally possessed, for falsehood and vanity;—terms very often applied in scripture to *idolatry*, —of which all the varieties may be justly regarded as involving a tissue of lies against the perfections of the true God. "The number of the idols of heathen mythology is a lie against his unity;—their corporeal nature is a lie against his pure invisible spirituality;—their confined and local residence, a lie against his omnipresence and immensity;—their limited and subdivided departments of operation, a lie against his universal proprietorship and dominion;—their follies and weaknesses, a lie against his infinite wisdom;—their defects, and vices,

and crimes, a lie against his unsullied purity and perfection. The entire system, in all its diversity of modes, is a sacrilegious robbery of heaven,—an universal slander on the character of the Most High."*

The *responsibility* of the Heathen being our present subject, I forbear to enlarge on the description given by the apostle of idolatrous practices; and would only urge for a moment longer, the conclusiveness imparted by the union of original knowledge with subsequent manifestation to the inference which he draws, and which it is his object to establish—"*So that they are without excuse.*"

It is quite manifest, as I had occasion to show at large in the first of the two former discourses, that to render ignorance and error inexcusable, there must be possessed sufficient means of knowledge and grounds of conviction, and sufficient natural capacity of observation and understanding. The absence of either the one or the other of these, would be quite a sufficient apology for error and ignorance. Means of knowledge would be unavailing without natural capacity; and equally unavailing would be any measure of capacity, without means of knowledge. Both of these were fully possessed by men, when they lost the knowledge, and departed from the worship, of the true God.—Observe how the case actually stands. It is a much easier matter to *retain* a lesson, especially when the memory is aided by constant repetitions of the same truth, than it is to *learn* one; to keep what is known, than to search out what is unknown; to remember, than to discover. Now discovery was not what man had

* The Contemplation of Heathen Idolatry an Excitement to Missionary Zeal: a Sermon by the author before the London Missionary Society, 1818.

originally to effect. Many of the speculations of philosophy proceed upon the assumption that, originally in ignorance, he had all his acquaintance with the Divine existence and perfections to gather,—to reason out his knowledge,—to explore his way from darkness into light. But such speculations have no basis in fact. "However inexcusable men might have been had this been the case,—had they been left, by the use of the capacities bestowed upon them, to collect the necessary knowledge from the works of God around them;—yet this was not, in point of fact, their situation. All that was to be effected by the numberless displays of eternal power and godhead," was only to *keep them in remembrance* of what they already knew. Yet even with these advantages, "when they knew God, they glorified him not as God." They did not "retain him in their knowledge;" but "changed the truth of God into a lie." They received at the first a lesson from God himself. They had this lesson written before their very eyes on every thing around them. Every thing in heaven above, and in the earth beneath, every part of animate and inanimate creation, repeated the truth to all their senses, had they but kept them open to observation. Yet they not only did not learn, but rejected or forgot what they had been taught; not only did not discover what was unknown, but lost what was known; and instead of being led by the creature to the Creator, put the creature in the Creator's place."

Surely in all this they were "without excuse."—To what cause are we to trace the mournful effect? It is not, as we have seen, to be accounted for from deficiency in the evidence of the truth, or from want of the means of knowledge; for both of these were possessed in the

most copious abundance:—neither can it be attributed to the want of natural capacity of observation and understanding; for on other subjects the powers of the human mind were most successfully exercised, evincing in many instances a perspicacity and a comprehensiveness, an acuteness of discrimination, a patience of research, and a power of discovery, that were creditable, and even wonderful.—The apostle, as I incidentally noticed in a former discourse, traces the effect of which I now speak, without hesitation, to a *moral cause*:—"They DID NOT LIKE," says he, (verse 28.) "TO RETAIN GOD IN THEIR KNOWLEDGE." On which words let the following observations be noticed:—

In the first place, they serve to confirm the explanation given of certain expressions in the preceding context, which we interpreted as importing that the true knowledge of God was originally possessed, and as having an immediate reference to that primeval knowledge. The words before us are in harmony with this interpretation: "they did not like to RETAIN God in their knowledge," being an expression which evidently assumes their previous acquaintance with his character. They *had* it, but did not *keep* it. They could not be supposed to *retain*, what it was their proper business to *discover*.

Secondly: That the loss of this knowledge is here ascribed to the pravity of moral principle,—to the want of right disposition,—to the alienation and enmity of the heart, is evident from *two* considerations. The first is, the word used by the apostle, rendered by our translators "they did not LIKE." The word has been variously translated by others:—"they did not *choose*,—they did not *approve*, they did not *think meet*,—to retain God in their knowledge." But the general idea conveyed is

much the same; there being evidently implied the charge of a wilful renunciation, and not a mere involuntary forgetfulness.—The second consideration is, the consequence that is represented as following: "*Forasmuch as* they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God *gave them over to a reprobate mind.* Now, whatever difficulty there may be, in ascertaining the precise nature of this consequence—(a subject of inquiry into which it would be but remotely connected with my present purpose to enter,) it must be admitted by all to be something *judicial.* Now we are quite sure that nothing of this kind could be inflicted on account of mere *deficiency of intellect*, or for what we are accustomed to term *simple ignorance.* Such a deficiency, or such an ignorance, as can in any way incur the punitive visitation or the judicial abandonment of God, must be a deficiency or an ignorance that has its origin in a *moral cause.* It must be connected with the disposition, or state of the heart. The miserable votaries of idolatry are accordingly represented as "walking in the vanity of their minds, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness (or rather the *hardness* or *callousness**) of their hearts."

To this source,—to the influence of "the carnal mind," which is "enmity against God,"—the philosophy of the Bible, in opposition to all the self-flattering wisdom of man, teaches us to trace the whole system of pagan idolatry, in all its varieties. The philosophy of this world, to save from degradation its own favourite idol *human nature*, may fondly speculate on other causes; and a sentimental charity may listen to its speculations, and

* Πώρωσιν.

please itself with its conclusions, and try to show, with a self-complacent smile, how *very natural* some of the aberrations of Heathen idolatry are. But the Bible speaks a very different language. It calls things by their true names. It pronounces a woe on those who "call evil good, and good evil, who put darkness for light, and light for darkness." It lays no flattering unctions to the soul. It allows nothing to be *religion* but what has the true and only God for its object. Every thing else it denounces as irreligion and atheism. Idolaters, however sincerely and rigidly superstitious, it represents as living "*without God* in the world;" and proceeds on the assumption, that the nature to which any description of idolatry is natural, must be a nature in a state of depravity and estrangement from God.—Polytheism and idolatry have been errors of the heart more than of the head. The head, at least, has been the dupe of the heart. The folly has sprung from the depravity; the infatuation and blindness of the judgment from the corruption and alienation of the affections. The vail has not been upon the truth, nor upon its evidences and manifestations, but upon the hearts of the apostate children of men. The true character of God is such as depraved creatures cannot possibly *like*, or *choose*. In the hearts of such creatures, there is a predisposition to unbelief,—to the rejection of the truth, and the admission of error: and it is thus that mankind have all along discovered so lamentable a propensity to adopt any views of God but the right views, and, to embrace fancies pregnant with the most palpable absurdity, whilst they readily banished from their minds those original truths, which were uncongenial to the tendencies of their fallen nature, condemned their whole character, and allowed their consciences no repose.

An objection may here be plausibly started, in behalf of those of our race who have lived long subsequently to the communication and possession of the original revelation. If the possession of this at first be *included in the ground of inexcusableness*; what are we to say of the Heathen *now*, and for many ages since the tradition was actually lost? The inexcusableness may justly be predicated of the first generation of mankind, who had the original knowledge; but how can it be brought home to those who *have it not?*

To this question, it may be answered, *in the first place*, —The principle of reasoning, or inference, from an effect to a cause, and from design apparent in the effect to a designing cause, is one so very obvious and simple, notwithstanding all the abstruseness and mystery with which some philosophers have attempted to invest it,—and one of such incessant application, one on which men proceed, every day and every hour, with unhesitating confidence, and without the slightest feeling of difficulty,—that the question naturally and strongly forces itself upon our minds,—how comes it, that they do not apply this principle to the indications abounding around them of the existence, and of the power and wisdom and goodness, of the Supreme First Cause of all things? Why are they *not* led, and led universally, to the discovery, acknowledgment, and worship, of the almighty, all-wise, and all-bountiful Maker, Preserver, and Governor of the universe. It has been before admitted, that diversity in the powers of understanding is one of the considerations that will enter into the account in adjusting the measure of criminality; and that deficiency of knowledge will be found to infer guilt, only in as far as it has arisen from the disposition and state of the heart,—from the want of

inclination to examine, to receive, and to retain the truth. But such is the nature of the case,—such the simplicity of the general argument,—that we cannot entertain a doubt, that, were there a truly right disposition and state of heart, there would be no embarrassment or difficulty in perceiving the inference, and in tracing creation to its origin.—Although, therefore, it may be granted, that the guilt of those will be proportionally heavier who lived near the commencement of the world's existence, when original revelation was comparatively recent, and the stream of tradition had run but a short distance from its source, —who consequently enjoyed greater advantages, and, in their loss of the knowledge and departure from the worship of the One true God, gave the stronger indications of the perverting and blinding influence of an alienated heart;—yet neither will they be found guiltless, who, living further on in the world's history, have failed to discover Deity in his works, and to correct by the lessons of creation the errors and corruptions of tradition. For surely, were the existence of a *right heart* conceivable before the possession of the knowledge of that Being who must be the Object of its affections and desires,—there could be no such thing as "*feeling after him*" without "*finding him.*"

Secondly: In the experiments which have been made on human nature, a specimen, or exemplification, has been given of what is its *universal character.*—The chemist, in pursuing his investigations in metallurgy, can never subject to experiment all the silver and gold that are in the bowels of the earth. What then does he do? He applies his various tests and processes to *specimens* of each, selected so as to yield fair and impartial results; and from these results he draws his general conclusions,

as to the nature and properties of the respective metals. And the conclusions are perfectly legitimate. What holds with regard to gold in the specimen, holds with regard to all gold in the same circumstances. The crucible contains the mine. The beating out of a grain proves all that is in the earth to be malleable; the melting of a globule under the flame of the blow-pipe proves all to be fusible; the drawing out of an inch of wire proves all to be ductile.—Thus has it been with respect to human nature. In the loss of the originally imparted knowledge of God, and that in circumstances so peculiarly favourable to its retention, even in the midst of innumerable lessons of remembrance,—we have an exemplification of what the tendency of human nature is. It was an experiment. And the conclusion which the experiment yielded was established by a continued trial of four thousand years, during which that which had been lost was never recovered, but the result remained the same—"the world by wisdom knew not God." And, as if to leave no ground of doubt as to the fairness of the inference; in the midst of this protracted and diversified manifestation of human inability and corruption, another trial was introduced,—a second experiment instituted,—and the result obtained was the same. The *tendency to reject the truth when known* was made strikingly manifest in the case of the Jews. The only people who were in the right, discovered an incessant propensity to exchange the right for the wrong; whilst the nations of surrounding idolaters adhered pertinaciously to their errors. Jehovah complains of his favoured people, as he had just cause to do, in the following striking terms:—"Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the Lord, and with your children's children will I plead. For pass over the isles of

Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing: Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit." And from all that we know of their history, we have very strong grounds for believing, that, but for the constant intervention of prophetic instructions and warnings, urged upon their attention by "line upon line, and precept upon precept," and of awakening miraculous attestations, and corrective judgments, the name and the worship of Jehovah would not long have continued among that people. They would have presented a second example of what took place originally, in the entire corruption and loss of the revelation committed to them, and in their merging again into the universal ignorance of polytheistic superstition and idolatry.

Now, from these experiments, we learn what human nature is. We have no reason to doubt that the same tendencies belong generically to it, that have been evinced in these particular cases, which include indeed a long period of time, and a great variety of trial:—and that, in all generations, had it been placed in the same circumstances, and left to itself, without divine interposition, it would have manifested these tendencies in the same way.

And if so, then the same evil principles, seen to exist by Him who "knoweth what is in man," infer of course the same guilt, and the same inexcusableness. "He seeth not as man seeth." The practical development of the principles is necessary to *our* perception of their existence: but it is not so with him. He knew the evils that were in human nature as well before the trial was made, as after. The trial has revealed them to us:—and the atheism of the human heart, the propensity of mankind

to live " without God in the world," has been established by indubitable proofs :—and not only the aborigines of our world,—and not only the seed of Abraham, but all mankind, in all places and in all generations, have shown themselves, in their ignorance of God, " without excuse."

Having made mention of the seed of Abraham, I am led to notice another consideration in regard to Heathen responsibility, which might, perhaps, with still greater propriety, have been introduced earlier. It is, that not only was there amongst mankind the tradition of original knowledge,—there was also in the world afterwards, for successive ages, *an existing revelation.* The Divine Being communicated the knowledge of his character and will, in a peculiar manner, to that Patriarch and his posterity ;—raising up amongst the race of Israel " holy men of God, who spoke as they were moved by his Holy Spirit," confirming the truth of their testimony by prophecies and miracles, and establishing the remembrance of it and of the prospects which it held forth, by the institution of an authoritative system of commemorative and typical worship. In the writings of Moses and the prophets, the ancient revelation was gradually completed,—forming those " Oracles of God," which were " committed" to that favoured people.—Now it was not for their own sake alone that they were thus favoured. They were blessed, that they might be a blessing. The lights of heaven were not kindled to shine for themselves. Neither was Divine truth communicated, to be confined to those who first received it. It was meant for diffusion. Israel was to be a kind of school for the nations. That people were to blame, when they made a monopoly of divinely imparted knowledge, prided themselves in it as their peculiar distinction, and were jealous of its going beyond their

own borders. And at the same time, those neighbouring nations were to blame, who heard of the name and wonderful works of the God of Israel, and were at no pains to avail themselves of the opportunities thus enjoyed of arriving at truth on the most important of all subjects. I might point out the connexion of Israel with the surrounding world, from the beginning of their history in the call of Abraham, down through its successive stages; and might illustrate it by a variety of instances, in which light did actually emanate from them, or in which it might have so emanated, had there been on their part the disposition to communicate, and on the part of others, the desire to receive. But such historical detail would detain us too long, and is not necessary to the establishment of our general principles. It is enough for my present purpose to observe, that those nations and individuals whose vicinity to Israel afforded them the readiest opportunities of acquaintance with the knowledge possessed by that people, and the evidences of its divine original, lay under an additional responsibility, besides that which arose from the light of reason. And there can be no doubt, that, had human nature been at all in a sound state, the nation that possessed the truth would have delighted in it themselves, and have embraced with benevolent joy every possible opportunity for its diffusion; and all around them would with grateful gladness have received it, and in their turn have promoted its circulation.—Of the amount of this description of responsibility, both as to existing opportunities, and the inclination to improve them, the Supreme Judge has a perfect knowledge; and he will bring it, as he will every thing else in which one man or one people can differ from another, into his final estimate of character and of guilt.

Such, then, has been the case of the Heathen, as it respects their means of knowledge, and the use they have made of them. Though without the written word, they have not been without sources of information. Had they been destitute of these, there could have been no ground of responsibility for their ignorance; and of that responsibility the measure must be, the extent of their means of knowledge. Even here, there are degrees. The natural manifestations of Deity are not every-where the same; the capacity for observation and inference, is not universally equal; and those who lived farthest back in the world's history, and nearest to the fountain of tradition, had more to answer for than those who came into being when tradition was corrupted or lost, and who were confined to the lessons of nature;—those lessons themselves, indeed, being, in some instances, perplexed rather than simplified, obscured rather than illustrated, by such tradition as remained,—if tradition it should at all be designated, between which and the original communication, there could be discerned no trace of resemblance; and the views and habits of idolatry, transmitted from preceding generations, proving hindrances rather than helps to the understanding of nature's instructions.

We shall leave the remainder of the discussion, and the general improvement of the whole, for a second discourse.

SERMON II.

In last discourse, I endeavoured to set before you the *principles of judgment*, according to which, the Scriptures uniformly and explicitly assure us, the judicial decisions of God relative to mankind in general, and especially to the Heathen, are to be formed and pronounced; and to demonstrate their thorough consistency with the most unimpeachable equity.—Having vindicated these principles, I proceeded to point out the leading facts of the case,—the circumstances in the history and condition of the Heathen world,—the variety and extent of their natural and traditionary opportunities of information,—on which the inexcusableness of their polytheistic ignorance and superstition is rested by the apostle.—Having made such observations as were deemed necessary on the *light* of nature, or their means of acquiring the knowledge of *truth*; it now remains for me to direct your attention to the *law* of nature, or their means of acquiring the knowledge of *duty*.

To this topic our attention is called by the verses that stand in immediate connexion with our text, though forming, as before noticed, a parenthesis :—verses 13—15.

(" For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; who shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.")

What is said in the thirteenth verse, (" For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified,") appears to have been designed, like the whole of the preceding part of the chapter, for the conviction of the impenitent and unbelieving Jews. They were " *hearers* of the law," but they were not *doers*. And yet they " rested in the law;" placing their infatuated confidence in that which condemned them; foolishly expecting safety and life in direct opposition to the very terms of that law on which they trusted, and in which they gloried.—In describing " the righteousness which is of the law," Moses had not said " The man that *heareth*," but " the man that *doeth* these things shall live by them;" and its condemnatory sentence was in harmony with its just and holy requirements— " Cursed is every one who continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." The law never did, and, from its very nature, never could, promise life, but upon condition of perfect practical obedience to all its precepts. And it was indeed passing strange, that these Jews should have " trusted in themselves that they were righteous," on account of the mere *hearing* of the law, the mere privilege of having it in their possession, whilst, instead of being *doers* of it, they were living in the flagrant and extensive violation of its

most express injunctions. It was an humbling manifestation of the deceitfulness of the heart, that they should have forgotten a principle so obvious as that *privilege increases responsibility*, and have relied for security on the very thing that was aggravating their condemnation.

But it is not to these "hearers," or possessors, of the law, that our present discussion immediately relates. It is to those who "*have not the law*,"—to the Gentiles, or Heathen, who are without the privilege of any written discovery of the divine will.—Of them it had just been said, "As many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law." But "*Sinned without law!*"—how, it might be asked, could this be? how is it consistent with the sentiment expressed in two subsequent parts of this epistle, chap. iv. 15.—"Where no law is, there is no transgression:"—and chap. v. 13. "Sin is not imputed when there is no law?"—And by another of the inspired writers, sin is defined to be "the transgression of law," 1 John iii. 4.

These inquiries are answered, and the difficulty obviously involved in them satisfactorily explained, in the fourteenth and fifteenth verses:—"For when the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing, or else excusing, one another."—These words bring again clearly before us the ground of divine judgment against the Gentiles. They are without the *written* law; but they *have a law*. Had they no law at all, they could be chargeable with no sin, and subject to no just sentence of condemnation. But they have a law;—a law enforced

by all that is made known of God in his works and ways, and by all their daily experience of his unwearied goodness:—and it will be for the violation of the dictates of *this* law, that the sentence against them shall be pronounced in the judgment.

The supposition, it will be observed, is here made, of the Gentiles, although without the revealed or written law of God, "*doing by nature the things contained in the law.*" This, however, is not to be understood as meaning, either that they do *all* these things, or that the principles from which *any* of them are done are such as to render the performance truly good and acceptable in the sight of God. It is quite enough for the apostle's argument, that the Gentiles, in their conduct, evince a sense of right and wrong,—convictions in their minds of sin and duty. Now, that they have such convictions, —such an inward sense of right and wrong, is very manifest, when at any time they pay regard to the claims of humanity, of justice, of natural affection, and of general benevolence, in opposition to the influence of contrary principles.—When any amongst them, at any time, in any part of their conduct, show such regard, they make it apparent, that, although without the written law, they are "a law unto themselves,"—they "show the work of the law written in their hearts."—There the law of God was written originally,—"not on tables of stone, but on fleshy tables of the heart." And although by the fall the impression of the divine hand-writing has been mournfully defaced and corrupted, yet it has never been entirely obliterated. In regard, indeed, to right dispositions of heart,—to the principles of godliness,—to true, spiritual, holy desires and affections, the obliteration is complete:—no trace of the original characters remains.

But the law itself has not been thoroughly erased from the mind, however entirely the heart may have lost the disposition to keep it. The erroneousness and debasement of the conceptions of moral good and evil prevalent among the heathen, have arisen from the very same cause to which the apostle traces their ignorance of God himself. The source of their dislike to "the only true God," was, the opposition of his pure and holy character to the pollutions of their fallen nature. And we need not surely wonder, that the same depravity should have produced, as far as the remaining light and power of reason would admit, the perversion and partial oblivion of that law which is "holy, and just, and good,"—condemning their trespasses,—"working wrath,"—and filling them with a "fearful looking-for of judgment." By all such voluntary erasement of the law of God from their hearts, deep guilt has been contracted. But still, the original impression, as I have said, is not gone. And while they wilfully act in opposition to the sense of right and wrong that is yet in their minds, they continue to "treasure up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath." That in the general tenor of their conduct they act thus perversely, the apostle had formerly, in the strongest terms, affirmed;—when, after enumerating the abominations prevalent amongst them, he added,—"Who, knowing the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."—The judgment originally pronounced by God against sin, was DEATH. Of this original sentence, to which the apostle seems here to refer, tradition could not fail to keep alive some remembrance. And as, in the former case, respecting the existence and character of God,

tradition was powerfully aided by external manifestations; so in this case, tradition had the assistance, as we shall notice more fully immediately, of natural conscience, inspiring convictions of guilt, and apprehensions of its consequences. And while the sentence of death was thus engraven on the memories and consciences of sinful men, the early and singular institution of animal sacrifices, before adverted to, spoke the very same language, reminding the offerer, by a highly significant symbol, of his guilt and condemnation to death, while it at the same time directed his views and hopes to the promised atonement.

Men, therefore, originally knew, and ought to have kept in humble self-abasing remembrance, "the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death." Yet, instead of this, they chose to cast off all restraint. Instead of "striving against sin" from fear of the divine displeasure, they rather strove to rid their minds of every check to the commission of it; and pouring contempt on the threatenings of heaven, and stifling the foreboding apprehensions of their own minds, they not only practised those things which God had condemned, but delighted in all who would be their associates in rebellion and wickedness. This indeed is perfectly natural. Companions in iniquity give a man countenance and courage in his evil courses. A wicked man, when surrounded by the good, is surrounded with reproofs,—with hated monitors, who will not suffer his memory to forget, or his conscience to slumber. But when, in doing evil, he follows the multitude, his mind is kept comparatively easy; his fears are laughed away; memory and conscience are lulled into a dead sleep,—disturbed only by occasional starts, the starts of suspicion

and terror, agonizing, but transient, lasting no longer than while the fascinations of society and the intoxication of sinful pleasures are withdrawn; and the career of social vice, freed from restraints, and increasing in impetuosity and recklessness, hurries him along to the chambers of death.

There are two things particularized by the apostle, in proof of the existence and operation, although irregular and partial, of that sense of right and wrong which he ascribes to the Gentiles;—two things, by which they "show the work of the law written in their hearts."—These are, the manifest operation of *conscience* amongst them, and their mutual *reasonings* on the principles of morals, and the criminality or rectitude of human actions.

"*Their conscience also bearing witness.*"—As the conclusiveness of the apostle's argument does not at all depend on the peculiar *nature* of conscience,—being entirely unaffected by the questions which have been agitated on this point amongst metaphysicians and moral philosophers;—it is quite unnecessary for me to enter at large into such inquiries. It is enough, that conscience, whatever be its appropriate nature, and mode of operation, acts the part, according to the apostle, of a witness, bearing testimony within of evil and of good, condemning the one, and approving the other.—I may be allowed, however, one or two passing observations.

For my own part, then, I have often, in thinking of this subject, been at a loss to conceive what *conscience* can include in it, beyond the exercise of the *judgment* in the particular department of morals. Even those who speak of it as if it were something different, or something more, are at the same time accustomed to use language about it, that will hardly apply to it in

any other view. They employ the common phrases. They speak of the *decisions* of conscience;—of conscience being well or ill *informed;* and of these decisions being more or less *enlightened* and *just*, according to the information it possesses.—When we speak of the pain which an awakened conscience inflicts,—what more do we mean than the pain which arises from the conviction, brought home to the mind, of our having done wrong? The pain will be various in degree, according to the clearness and the force of this conviction; according to the apprehension which the mind has of the intrinsic evil of sin in general, and of the nature and circumstantial aggravations of the particular transgression. The consciousness of the wrong done is not the pain, but the cause of the pain. When the apostle Paul says, "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world," he does not mean to identify the *testimony* and the *joy*, but, by a common mode of speech, to assign the one as the cause of the other. In the same way, it was the testimony of conscience in Felix,—it was the conviction, forced upon his judgment, of the enormity of his crimes, that made him "tremble" under the faithful warnings of the preacher of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." The consciousness was not the trembling, nor the fear which the trembling indicated; it was the cause of both.—We speak of *conscience slumbering;* and we oppose to this figurative phrase that of an *awakened conscience.* We mean by the former, that when the disposition to evil hurries on a person in a course of worldliness and vice, the mind is kept from thinking; reflection and anticipation are

alike repressed; there is no alarm, because there is no considerate thought; and this banishment of thought, which at first might require an effort and the use of various subsidiary means, becomes itself habitual by the influence of the progressive habit of evil-doing. The conscience again is wakened, when, by any alarming event, or powerful pleading, or whatever else may have the tendency to rouse, the mind is startled, and made to think; the claims of religion and virtue, of God and of the soul, are forced upon its notice; the infatuation and the damning tendency of sin, and the awful certainties of death and judgment and eternity, are, in spite of its natural and contracted unwillingness to think of them, pressed upon its view. And the vividness of the consequent emotions will correspond with the clearness of the mind's perceptions, and the strength of its convictions and impressions.—It must be obvious, however, that if in any one case the judgment is in danger of being perverted by the disposition or inclination,—of having its dictates biassed or silenced,—it is in matters of moral right and wrong; where duty presents itself under the aspect of the effort and pain of self-denial, and its opposite under that of the ease and pleasure of self-indulgence. It is thus that conscience is tampered with, and its remonstrances overcome. It discharges its function as a punisher of evil, much more efficiently than as a preventer; chastising by subsequent remorse, more frequently than it hinders by previous restraint.

But whether this simple view of the nature of conscience, as a modification of the judging faculty, or rather as that faculty itself exercised in a special department,—be correct or not, the argument of the apostle is not in the least affected by either its soundness or its

error.—Whatever view we take of it, and by whatever name we call it, its office is to bear inward testimony to the good or the evil of our thoughts, and words, and actions.

It is very true, as has often been remarked, that the practices of different nations seem to indicate a diversity in the dictates of this inward monitor; some actions being in one place held and treated as reprehensible, and even severely punishable, which in another incur no particular censure, nay are even approved and vindicated. The truth, however, appears to be, that conscience has partaken of the general depravity of man's nature; and in the exercise of that which is corrupt, affected too, as it necessarily must be, by an endless variety of modifying circumstances, we are not entitled to expect uniformity of operation. And besides this, it should be carefully noticed, that the diversities alluded to, in the views and practices of different peoples, do by no means, in every or perhaps in any case, with certainty establish the existence of a diversity in the natural intimations of conscience. It is very evident, that by various causes,—by views, for example, of present utility and temporary interest, or by the desire to press all possible aids into the service of a favourite object, and to remove obstructing difficulties out of the way of its attainment,—certain customs may come to prevail, in opposition to conscience;—and by conformity to these customs, when thus established, conscience may in time cease to be at all affected.—Is not the truth of this observation exemplified every day within our own experience and observation? Men are tempted to some sinful action by views of present pleasure or advantage. The temptation recurs, and the sin is repeated. The repetition

renders it familiar, gradually diminishing the check of self-reproach. Reason is perverted to support inclination, and to satisfy an uneasy mind. And, through the illusory influence of unsound and biassed arguments, that action may cease altogether to excite remorse, and may even come to be sanctioned and justified, which conscience at the first decidedly condemned.—Conscience is, in the passage before us, spoken of as " bearing witness." But it is a witness-bearer of little principle,—exposed, in many ways, to the influence of bribery and corruption, ever ready to give a false verdict, and to flatter men in the indulgence of their worldly and vicious inclinations. My own persuasion is, that the dictates of conscience amongst mankind are much more uniform than the discrepancies in human practice, although by no means of trifling magnitude, might, at first view, lead us to imagine: —and that these very discrepancies arise chiefly, if not even solely, from such varying conceptions of utility and present advantage as have just been noticed, influencing and overcoming this highly important, but, as belonging to a fallen nature, depraved and partial principle. These conceptions are diversified by situation, both among nations and in the breasts of individuals; and the operation of the principle which is thus variously and corruptly influenced naturally appears itself to vary, according to the variety of the corrupting cause.

While " their conscience bears witness," " *their reasonings among themselves accuse or vindicate.*"— Thus the latter part of the verse has with more strict correctness, been translated;*—the word rendered in our English Bibles *thoughts*, properly signifying *reason-*

* Καὶ μεταξὺ αλλήλων τῶν λογισμῶν κατηγορούντων, ἢ καὶ ἀπολογουμένων,

ings; and, when thus rendered, presenting a distinct additional evidence of that sense of right and wrong, that *inward law*, of which it is the apostle's object to prove the existence and operation:—whereas, if our ordinary translation is retained, it will not be very easy to distinguish between the "*thoughts*" and those *dictates of conscience* which he had already mentioned.

The "reasonings" of the Heathen concerning the principles of morals and of jurisprudence, and concerning the various personal and social virtues, clearly evince those convictions of good and evil in human conduct, of which the universal prevalence, although in various degrees of imperfection and corruption, is here affirmed.—The whole procedure of their courts of justice, (however rude, in some countries, these institutions may be) in trial, acquittal, condemnation, and punishment, is a farther manifestation of the same thing;—for beyond question, in these proceedings there is mixed with a regard to public utility the higher sentiment of moral approbation and disapprobation.—The writings of some of the Heathen philosophers, moreover, contain a very considerable portion of just and excellent moral precept;—and although it is mingled with much, and sometimes gross, error,—and, from their ignorance of the true God, is necessarily destitute of the life and soul of genuine morality,—yet those of their reasonings in which virtue is approved and vindicated, and vice exposed and condemned, are sufficiently illustrative of the truth of the apostle's representation, respecting "the work of the law written in their hearts."—Even the reasonings of transgressors, with the view of maintaining their characters, by clearing themselves of the imputation of crime, or by palliating and excusing their criminal conduct, proceed on the very

same principle, involving the admission of the sense of right and wrong, both in their own breasts and in the breasts of their fellow men, with whom they associate, and whose good opinion they are desirous to secure.

Such, then, is the case of the Heathen; such their means of information, as to *truth*, and as to *duty;* such the *light* and the *law* of nature.—The possession of these rendered them "without excuse" in their universal loss of the knowledge, and defection from the worship, of the living God, and in the endless variety of "abominable idolatries" into which they fell: and not less inexcusable were they, in the practical corruption of morals by which these idolatries were accompanied, and of which the apostle presents an enumeration so fearful in the close of the former chapter—ver. 28—32. "And forasmuch as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient: being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who, knowing the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."

To dwell minutely on the different features of this hideous picture, is as unnecessary, as it would be painful. It shows the deplorable length to which the corrupt affections of a reprobate mind will carry those who are given up to their fearful dominion. For alas! the por-

trait is not an imaginary one,—the aggravated caricature of a gloomy yet lively fancy. It is sketched by the pencil of truth;—it is drawn from the life. We are not, it is true, to suppose all the evils here enumerated to exist in individual characters;—except, indeed, in so far as that "enmity against God," which constitutes the very essence of human depravity, may be considered as summing them all up in itself,—as the latent germ of every possible evil. But the various wicked dispositions, impure desires, malignant passions, and unholy practices, which are included in this dark catalogue of evils, are not only to be found, but are common and prevalent, and have ever been so, amongst the idolatrous Heathen. —Even the gods themselves of the most enlightened nations have been not infrequently the patrons of the most infamous crimes, and have been worshipped with the most cruel and detestable rites, such as outrage every feeling of humanity and decency, and of which "it is a shame even to speak."—The distinctive characters of different nations may be various. Some of the features in the picture may appear with more or less of characteristic aggravation or diminution, according to particular circumstances. But of the *general state* of the Gentile world, at that time, and still, the outline here drawn, hideous as it is, is not overcharged, but faithful to nature and to fact.

Attempts, indeed, have been sometimes made to impose upon public credulity, by accounts of a widely different description from this. Representations the most fascinating have been drawn of the gentle manners and amiable virtues of particular tribes of the Heathen. Representations so fascinating, that we have been in danger of deluding ourselves into a persuasion of their reality

by the very pleasure which the perusal of them has imparted. We have yielded to the charm, and wished ourselves on the happy spot, which (but for the absence of God) has seemed like "paradise restored." But, whencesoever these descriptions have had their origin, —whether they have been the product of hasty and partial observation, united perhaps with a portion of sentimental enthusiasm, and of fondness for a pleasant picture and a wish to make a display of skill in the execution of it; or whether they have been, in part at least, the offspring of hostility to revelation, and a desire to impress the conviction on the public mind that natural religion answered all the purposes of human happiness quite as well,—that there might be as much, if not more, of unsophisticated simplicity, and real goodness of heart, under the teaching of nature and the prevalence of idolatry, as in nations called christian, under the influence of a higher and more refined faith:—whatever may have been the motives for their publication, subsequent visits to the same tribes have detected the imposture, have discovered the want of resemblance between the picture and the original, and established the truth of the apostle's description.

From all that has been said, it will be apparent, that when we speak of *Natural Religion* we use a phrase susceptible of very different meanings. The prevailing conceptions regarding it are, as I have formerly hinted, exceedingly vague and undefined; so that, while every man fancies he understands it, few are able to give a distinct or ready answer to the inquiry, What is it? or are at all sensible of any difficulty, till, by some such question, they are fairly led to apply their thoughts to the subject. It is obvious, that there are *two* inquiries respecting it, which

are, in a great degree, independent of each other. The first regards *the existence of evidence*,—the second, the *perception of that evidence by men*. It is not less obvious, that of these two inquiries the second resolves itself again into two. The evidence being supposed to exist—*Do men possess powers sufficient to qualify them for perceiving it?*—and secondly, supposing such powers possessed, *Has it actually been perceived by them?*—And then arises a *third* question—If, with these powers, they have *not* perceived it, *whence has arisen their ignorance?—to what cause is it to be ascribed?*

Natural Religion may accordingly be understood in two senses. It may either stand for those views of the "things of God" *which mankind have actually, without Divine revelation, attained to;*—or, for those truths which, whether men have actually discovered them without revelation or not, *are capable of being proved by sufficient natural arguments.*—Natural religion in the latter sense, and natural religion in the former, may be two very different things. In the latter sense, there is room for no small diversity of speculative opinion, with regard to the number and description of the articles of truth that should be comprehended under it. In the former sense, the whole history of mankind, comprising an immensely extensive induction of facts, irresistibly leads us to one conclusion, that natural religion consists in *ignorance of the true God*, and *polytheistic idolatry;*—the history presenting many a variety, but no exception. It is of essential consequence, that when the subject of natural religion is discussed, the difference between these two views of it should be borne in mind; since nothing can be more vain and illusory, than for a man, placed on the vantage ground of an existing revelation, to set

himself to demonstrate what nature teaches, and to leave it to be inferred that the lesson has been actually learned, —that the arguments have been perceived, and the conclusions deduced, and the obligations arising from them obeyed. The state of facts, as we have been largely showing, is fearfully the reverse of this. If from these facts we form our estimate of natural religion,—regarding it in its actual subsistence, and not in the speculations of theory,—our estimate must be very low indeed. Even in its "best estate," it is "altogether vanity." "The world by wisdom has not known God." The powers of the human mind have been vigorously and successfully employed in every other department of knowledge. There has been no deficiency of intellectual acuteness and energy in other investigations. But even the masters of science and philosophy have been but dark and feeble and perplexed conjecturers on the things of God. And, this being the fact, we are constrained to trace the ignorance and blindness to moral causes,—to the perverting influence of an alienated heart. And here lies the ground of Heathen responsibility. Their guilt may be lighter, by many degrees, than that of those who, enjoying the higher advantages of a written revelation, continue in a state of alienation from the truth of God, and rebellion against his will:—and of the guilt contracted by different nations, and by different individuals in each, the degrees may also be very various. But these it is not ours to determine. It belongs to Him who has the perfect knowledge of all circumstances, and of all minds. He alone is competent to fix the amounts of moral culpability, and to graduate a corresponding scale of punishments. If, from reason and from scripture, we can ascertain the great principles according to which the Divine judgment

are to be conducted; this (I cannot repeat too often) is all we have to do with. Further we cannot go, without trespassing on the province, and assuming the prerogatives, of Deity.

And with regard to these principles of judgment, I may simply recur to my former position,—that the one which is so explicitly laid down in the text, is that of the purest and most unimpeachable equity. I defy the most determined objector to devise a fairer.—Leave the Heathen, then, my friends, in the hands of that God, of whom you may surely be confident that he will DO THEM NO WRONG. And whilst, as becomes you, you are satisfied with principles, and leave their application with God, let me most affectionately and earnestly beseech you to "LOOK TO YOURSELVES." The general principle of the text is, that responsibility is according to privilege. Make but the supposition, then. IF—*if* you are really in possession of a communication from Deity, think seriously and maturely of the consequence. In these circumstances, the principle of our Lord's expostulation with those cities that had heard his words, and seen his works, and yet repented not, will be found, in all its emphasis, applicable to you. It will be more tolerable for the Heathen, who have been "without law," who have never heard of the Bible, or of the Saviour whom it reveals, than it will be for you, if, in the enjoyment of your superior privileges, you shall have lived "without God." The weight of your judgment, in the day of final decision, will be beyond calculation heavier.—Consider, then, the importance of inquiry;—of ascertaining whether the Holy Scriptures do indeed contain a revelation from God. Instead of vainly cavilling at the arrangements of Heaven in regard to *others*, be thankful for the special

kindness of Heaven to *yourselves:*—and, instead of attempting to unravel all the intricacies of the Divine procedure, and fretting because it is not given to you to sound those depths, which even the line of an Archangel's intellect may not be able to fathom,—leave it with the Supreme Judge to settle accounts with your fellow-creatures, who have been less favoured than you; and believe them secure from all unfair dealing at the bar of "the righteous Lord who loveth righteousness."

And surely, in the very state and character of the Heathen, you have a most affecting and convincing evidence of the necessity and value of a Divine revelation. The necessity very early appeared; and the whole of the subsequent history of the world continued, with increasing conclusiveness, to evince it.—And, while the contemplation of the difference between your condition and theirs calls for your gratitude and praise on your own account, it calls no less loudly for earnest prayer for them,—prayer, of which the sincerity must be testified by ardent and active zeal to communicate to them the enjoyment of the same privileges by which you are distinguished.—Whether God, in the exercise of his sovereign grace, ever, by his Holy Spirit, makes use of the truths taught by the light of nature, for the renovation of the hearts of men, we have been constrained to leave in uncertainty. But of one thing we are sufficiently sure, that such cases, if they have ever existed, have been exceedingly rare. The grand instrument of regeneration, as it is the only ground of acceptance, is "the word of the truth of the gospel." The Heathen are dying by thousands, in a state of entire ignorance of the remedy for human guilt provided by the God with whom they have to do, and in a state of utter unfitness for the only existing heaven. They have

"sinned," it is true, "without law," and they "perish without law:" but still they perish. And let us not fancy, that perdition, in any of its degrees, is a matter of light import, from which we need not be very much concerned about saving our fellow mortals. That can be no light matter, deliverance from which cost the blood of the Son of God. And whether we contemplate the effects which the knowledge of Divine revelation brings with it, in regard to this world, or in regard to that which is to come, true benevolence should not allow us to slacken our efforts in its diffusion, till "all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of God."—Fancy not, that because they do not possess the privilege of revelation, they are in no danger. In no danger! whilst they are thus, under the influence of an infatuation that has a vitiated heart for its original and its continued cause, "changing the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts and creeping things; and worshipping and serving the creature rather than the ever blessed Creator!" In no danger! while they are living "full of all unrighteousness," and realizing, in all its hideous features, that portraiture of depravity which we have just had before us! They *are* in danger; perishing in sinfulness and guilt, and unfitness for the kingdom of heaven. And we have in our possession that knowledge which, to them as well as to ourselves, is "life eternal;"—that "word of the Lord, of which the entrance gives light, and imparts understanding to the simple;"—that gospel which is "the power of God unto salvation," the divine method of pardoning mercy, the divine instrument of spiritual renovation. Are we then to keep this knowledge to ourselves? to make a selfish monopoly of our high

privileges? No, my brethren. We lie under a weighty responsibility. Possessing a treasure of inestimable preciousness, of which others are destitute,—we are bound by all the obligations of piety and of philanthropy to communicate it to others; and the more favourable our opportunities are for doing so, the more imperative becomes the duty, and the heavier the accountableness.

There is one objection against missions to the Heathen, which has sometimes been offered, and to which, as being immediately connected with the main subject of our present discussion, I may briefly advert. It is—that by sending the Gospel, or Divine revelation, to the Heathen, you *increase their responsibility, and their consequent guilt and danger, if they should not profit by your gift.*

Now, in reply to this objection, I would begin by at once admitting the fact. We *do* increase their responsibility. This is clearly implied in the principle which it has been our object to establish,—that responsibility is according to privilege—an increase of privilege bringing with it a proportionate increase of obligation.—But I should wish it to be considered, by those who make the objection, how far, if carried out to its legitimate consequences, it will necessarily lead them.—It will evidently apply, I do not say with the same force, but in the *spirit* and *principle* of it, to every blessing of which it is possible for us to have the enjoyment ourselves, in connection with the power of imparting it to others.

The possession of Divine revelation augments responsibility. Granted. But so also does knowledge in general; so does power; so does wealth; so does civilization, with its attendant benefits; so does superior mental capacity and genius;—so, in a word, does every thing in which it is possible for one human being, or one society of human

beings, to surpass another.—The parent who instructs his child, increases that child's responsibility:—are we then to withhold the precious boon of early education, and be careful to keep our families in universal ignorance?—The patriot, who enlarges the liberties and multiplies the blessings of his country, increases the responsibility of his countrymen:—are we therefore, instead of embalming his memory, and transmitting his name to the praises of future generations, to scowl upon him as an enemy, and load him with reproaches and maledictions?—The man who, by miracle or by skill, imparts sight to the blind, increases the responsibility of him who is the recipient of the benefit;—he gives him another sense which he may abuse, a new instrument to employ in the service of sin:—is the darkening film, then, to be left on the eye, and the delights and advantages of vision to be wilfully withheld, lest he who receives them should, ungratefully and perversely, aggravate his condemnation?—The gracious Redeemer of men, during his ministry on earth, scattered around him, wherever he went, in the benevolent exercise of his miraculous power, a varied profusion of temporal good:—the blind received their sight, the dumb spoke, the deaf heard, the lame walked, the lepers were cleansed, the sick were cured, the demoniacs were dispossessed. In all these cases, he laid an obligation on the subjects of his delivering power;—he increased their responsibility:—and are we therefore to believe, that he was all the while doing them harm rather than good, scattering curses amongst mankind instead of blessings?—Every favour that "cometh down from the Father of lights" increases the responsibility of him who receives it:—is it our duty, then, to pray that he may confer upon us none of his benefits, lest we should incur the guilt of abusing them?

—All this is obviously extravagant; and yet it appears to be no more than the legitimate application of the general principle, on which men would forbid our sending the message of Divine revelation to the Heathen, lest, by adding to their accountableness, we should be the means of aggravating their guilt.

I must go further. The principle of the objection, if fairly carried out, will land us in a charge of unkindness against the God of love himself, for having at all made and revealed such a scheme of mercy as the gospel contains. For certainly, if the objection be valid in the case of any particular people, it must have equal validity in application to the whole race. If *we* ought to refrain from sending the gospel to any nation, because by so doing we should increase their responsibility, and aggravate the condemnation of those who reject it; then will it inevitably follow, that God should have withheld the tidings of salvation from our apostate world, because wherever those tidings come the same consequence necessarily follows. If the tidings came *at all*, they must of course have come *to some*:—but, upon the principle of the present objection, the desirable distinction was the distinction of ignorance. Ignorance was bliss. And the extension of the knowledge,—since, wherever it came, it was heightening the responsibility and augmenting the possible guilt of men,—was but the extension of an evil, or, at best, of an uncertain and problematical benefit!—Thus, in the principle of this argument against missions to the Heathen, the procedure of Deity is implicated. We are brought to the strange and unnatural conclusion,—a conclusion, from which every mind will revolt that retains in it unquenched a single spark of reason or of generous sentiment, that the very offer of mercy is

unmerciful,—the presentation for acceptance of "fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore" ungracious and cruel,—because those to whom the offer is made may be pleased, from pride and corruption, to refuse it! Men may reject the "counsel of the Most High;" and therefore they are justified in fretting against the Lord for having given it! —This will never do. The sole inquiry with us, should be—"Is it *in itself* a blessing? and is it the will of God, that this blessing should be imparted, by those who have it, to those who have it not? If we are satisfied that it is, let us act accordingly, and leave the result with God.

The general principle that *responsibility is according to privilege* may be further illustrated, and improved for our own practical benefit, by comparing together one or two other cases.

Take, for example, in the first place, the circumstances of the people of God in Old Testament times, in comparison with the privileges of those who lived at the period of Christ's advent, and in what the Apostle terms "the beginning of the gospel."—The Old Testament revelation was given by degrees,—"at sundry times, and in diverse manners." For a long period, it was not written, but traditionary; and, when committed to writing, it was comparatively obscure, the truth being, for wise ends, partially and gradually disclosed,—shadowed forth in types, veiled in prophetic imagery, and wrapt up in promissory intimations of a future age. That age commenced, when the Seed of the woman appeared; when "the Word was made flesh," and, having finished by his atoning death the work given him to do, ascended to the right hand of God, and poured out upon his servants the Spirit of a clear and full illumination. Then the darkness passed away, and the true

light shone forth.—"Blessed are your eyes," said Jesus himself to his disciples, "for they see, and your ears for they hear: for verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." "God who at sundry times, and in diverse manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets," says an inspired apostle, "hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son:"—and, having shown the superiority of this Divine Messenger to every human, angelic, and created nature, he adds—"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed unto the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip: for if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness by signs and wonders, and diverse miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his will." * We enter not into any exposition of these passages. We only remark upon them, that they express, clearly and strongly, the enjoyment of superior advantages, as bringing along with it superior obligation, higher responsibility, and the danger of incurring heavier guilt.

Let us now, then, compare our own case with that of those who lived in the time of Christ and his apostles.—Here, in regard to the amount of responsibility, the balance may, at first view, appear in our favour. Our

* Matt. xiii. 16, 17. Heb. i. 1. ii. 1—4.

advantages may seem inferior, and our accountableness proportionably less. But a little reflection, perhaps, may throw more than doubt on the correctness of this estimate. It is true, we have not the privilege of hearing the discourses of him who "spake as never man spake," of seeing in his character the practical displays of perfect excellence, or of witnessing those "mighty works which testified of him that the Father had sent him." But we have before us recorded specimens of his heavenly wisdom :—we have the portraiture of his character, the very conception of which is superhuman, and still more so the inimitable consistency with which throughout it is supported :—and as to miracles, we have the Divine omnipotence for their *possibility*, the paramount importance of the occasion for their *likelihood*, and for their *certainty*, the evidence of such testimony,—so numerous, so disinterested, so consistent, and so severely tried,—so perfectly uniting in it every requisite to credibility, that to refuse it is to raze the very foundations of all human confidence. The evidence of a miracle to the truth which it was wrought to attest, remains, from the nature of the thing, invariably the same ; and as to the fact of the miracle having been wrought, the evidence of combined testimony may, in certain circumstances, be equal, if not even superior, to the evidence of individual sense. And, instead of the force of this evidence having decreased with the lapse of time, successive ages have produced in its support other proofs, which the very persons who performed the miracles announced for futurity in the form of *prophecies*. The fulfilment of these is a direct and accumulating evidence, both of the truth of the Book which contains them, and of the miracles ascribed to those who uttered them. The destruction of Jeru-

salem,—the present state of the Jews,—the progress of the gospel,—the rise, character, and dominion of the man of sin,—and other remarkable events, have borne their successive testimony to the truth of the apostolic records, and have thus successively raised the standard of modern accountableness. And to this a variety of other descriptions of evidence might be added, which have been also gathered by the advance of time; and amongst these not the least, the experiment which has been made of the efficacy of the gospel on the characters of men, by which it has been practically demonstrated to be "the power of God unto salvation." Contemplate it in its present career. Gamaliel spoke truth, when, looking at the nature of the new system, at the instruments and human means of its advancement, and at the difficulties with which it had to contend, he said—"If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found even to fight against God." It has *not* come to nought; it has *not* been overthrown; and, considering what it has come through, its very existence at this day might be pleaded in evidence of its being from Heaven. Its *existence*, did I say? And is it now in a struggle for existence? No verily. Never was it more firmly established: never did it present a more imposing aspect of strength, or exhibit a fairer and surer promise of universality and permanence. It is rapidly pushing its way throughout the world; and wherever it comes, it is,—not by fire and sword, and the "carnal weapons" of human conquest, but by the force of truth alone,—overturning the altars of paganism, substituting for the polluted and merciless rites of idolatry the pure and benevolent service of the one true and living God, and

constraining men, under the influence of new principles, "to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly."—Our responsibility, then, is far from being on the wane. Time is multiplying and enforcing, not abridging and invalidating, evidence; and the condemnation of those who now reject the truth will not be less heavy than in "the beginning of the gospel."

We might apply the principle, further, to the case of young persons who enjoy the benefit of early religious tuition. Not a few such are now hearing me. You are favoured, my young friends, with a most important privilege. May you all be impressed with its true value, and disposed and enabled to make a right use of it!—for if you fail to do this, the blessing will, in *your* case also, be converted into a curse. It increases your responsibility; it will aggravate your condemnation. Compare your condition with that of children whom God has been pleased to bereave of the guides of their youth,—who have no parents. And compare it with the condition of those who have parents that care not for their souls,—that bring them up, not in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord," but in ignorance of God, in worldliness, and in sin. Is there a young person now hearing me, who, at the mention of such, feels a rising envy?—a wish he were, like them, free from irksome restraint, and the constant iteration of truths, and precepts, and cautions, and serious warnings?—and left to pursue at liberty the "course of this world," and to take his indulgence in the "pleasures of sin?" Ah! my dear young friend, take care what you wish. God may grant your thoughtless desire. He may do so, by taking away those who now instruct and warn you, pray for you,

and watch and weep over you. You may thus get your wish;—you may be left to take your own way. But it is a way, be assured, of imminent peril,—of peril to *all*, —of imminent peril to *you*. It leads to perdition; and to a perdition, in your case, aggravated by neglected and abused privilege; of which the unceasing remembrance and unavailing regret will be as "the gall of asps within you." You will know the value of the blessing from the awful experience of the woe resulting from the misimprovement of it. It will be more tolerable, in the day of jndgment, for the families of ungodly parents,—and for children that had no means of religious instruction, than for you. You must be "beaten with many stripes."

Finally; let all lay to heart the privileges they enjoy; not to rest, as the infatuated Jews did, in the mere possession of them,—but, with gratitude to him by whom they are bestowed, to make a right improvement of them. O never let the fancy delude your souls, that privilege is to save you. Nothing external can save you; —no connection with parentage,—no possession of the written word,—no observance of ordinances,—no providential distinctions;—nothing can save you, but an interest, by faith, in the righteousness and atonement of Jesus Christ, and, through him, in the riches of Divine mercy; —an interest, of which the reality must be evinced by a life of obedience to the Divine will, imitation of the Divine example, and active zeal for the Divine glory.— "There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away, behold all things are become new."

APPENDIX.

In No. XI. of the *Westminster Review*, the first Article is a Critique on a work entitled "Essays on the formation and publication of opinions, and other subjects." With a great deal of what that article contains, on the highly important subject of the *proper mode of dealing with evidence*, under the two heads of "Fulness of collection," and "Equality of reception," I perfectly agree. The statements indeed are such,—so obviously accordant with the reason of things, and the common sense of mankind,—as hardly to admit of any dispute. By whom the article was written, I have not even the slightest conjecture. But in the perusal of it, I could not divest myself of the impression, that there is in its pages a pretty frequent exhibition of commonplace truths, in a somewhat ostentatiously learned and logical style,—a parade of ecclesiastical and philosophical authorities, for what hardly required either names or proofs to support it,—and quite as great a degree at least of the pretension to metaphysical acumen, as of the reality.

The grand charge against me, in that part of the Critique in which, I have the honour to be introduced, is, that I have confounded two things which are essentially different, and attached to the one the consequences which belong to the other. The things thus alleged to be confounded

are, *belief* and the *mode of dealing with evidence.* The Reviewer considers the two propositions, that a man *is not responsible for his belief*, and that a man *is responsible for his mode of dealing with evidence*, as propositions alike indisputable:—so that, whilst belief can, in no case, incur culpability, in the mode of dealing with evidence it may be incurred, in all its shades, from the least to the greatest. And in the sense in which he sets forth these propositions, he is undoubtedly in the right.

But when we announce, or hear announced, the proposition that *man is responsible for his belief*, what reasonable person can ever fancy, that the responsibility affirmed has reference only to the simple intellectual conviction arising from the perception of evidence, exclusively of every thing in the man by which his perception of evidence might be influenced, and his belief ultimately determined? It is a self-evident truth, that when we speak of a man's responsibility for any thing whatever, it must be something connected with the operation of *moral principle.* With what is purely *corporeal* we cannot associate any idea of accountableness: and no more can we with what is purely *intellectual.* The latter, in regard to responsibility, stands on the very same footing with the former. When we speak then, as we freely and frequently do, of a man as responsible for any *manual act*, we do not of course mean the *act itself*, but the *motive* that prompted to it,—the *animus* that induced the perpetration of it. It is not the *hand* that is answerable, but the *mind*, as influenced by moral considerations. We include in our idea of responsibility every thing in the moral state of the principles and affections by which the external act (itself unsusceptible of any moral qualities) has been suggested and perpetrated. This is quite under-

stood; and he who should find fault with the language, and object that a mere external action could never be the subject of praise or blame, of desert or demerit, would justly be chargeable with hypercriticism and pedantry. Thus it is, in like manner, when we speak of a man's being responsible for his *belief*. We necessarily include *what leads to it*. Belief, considered simply as the immediate and necessary assent of the mind to the truth of a proposition on the perception of its evidence, is purely intellectual. Who ever thought of responsibility for this, considered in itself, abstractedly from every thing moral by which it has been influenced? To separate the two in this case, would be just as unreasonable, as, in estimating the amount of guilt in an outward action, to separate the action from its motive.

We are sometimes obliged, in considering the grounds of accountableness, to go even farther back than the immediate motive of the action. For example: our Saviour says to his apostles, in forewarning them of the evils they had to expect in the fulfilment of their commission,—"the time cometh when whosoever killeth you *will think that he doeth God service*," John x. 2. and of this we have an exemplification in Saul of Tarsus, who says respecting his own conduct as a persecutor,—"I verily thought with myself that *I ought* to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth," Acts xxvi. 9. Now the general position is a correct and universally admitted one, that *it is right for a man to act according to the dictates of his conscience*. Are we, then, by this principle shut up to the approval, or at least precluded from the condemnation, of the violent and bloody deeds of such persecutors as were thus actuated by conscientious motives? We never hesitate to answer, No. But on

what ground does our answer rest? On the ground that their conscience was *ill-informed*, that they *ought* to have known better, and that the spirit or state of heart could not be really good, however plausible in appearance, from which a perversion of principle so monstrous had its origin. I adduce this case, for the purpose of showing, that, in our estimate of responsibility, we are accustomed, and indeed necessitated, to take in, not the action alone, but its motive,—and not even the immediate motive alone, but, if it be a mistaken one, the previous state of the moral feelings, with their modifying circumstances, by the influence of which the mistake has been produced. The same person accordingly who tells us that, when he was a ringleader in persecution, he acted from a conviction of conscience,—acknowledges himself afterwards to have been, while engaged in that course, "the chief of sinners:" and he makes this acknowledgment, because, when his eyes were opened to the true state of the case, he became sensible that "a deceived heart had turned him aside,"—that his moral principles had been perverted, and that under the false semblance of zeal for the divine glory there had been covered a deep-seated alienation from God, an aversion to truth, and a proud and heartless self-sufficiency.

The Reviewer represents me as "arraigning Mr. B. "for having declared in his Inaugural Discourse, that when "evidence is present to the human mind, belief is not a "voluntary, but a necessary consequence."—By evidence being *present to the human mind*, is here, of course, to be understood its being *discerned by the mind;* for according to the subsequent admission of the Reviewer himself, evidence, even the strongest and most conclusive, may be presented to the mind, and yet, from the power

of predisposing causes, its force and conclusiveness may not be at all perceived. Of the admitted doctrine, that belief must be according to the perception of evidence, he is pleased to say:—"The Rev. Dr. W. does, in this "case, what is so very apt to be done by a man who "does not like a certain proposition, and yet sees danger "in disavowing it: *he both attacks and maintains the* "*doctrine.*"—But this is not true.—The following sentences he quotes as my *affirmation* of it:—"I am far "from intending to question the soundness of the axiom "that belief must necessarily correspond with the per-"ception of evidence, it being in the nature of the thing "impossible that the mind should believe otherwise than "as evidence is or is not discerned. It is quite entitled "to the designation of an axiom, being a self-evident and "indisputable truth."—"No admission," says the Critic, "could be more full and unequivocal."—Well: and where is my denial or "attack" of this principle? The Reviewer finds it in my attempt to prove that man *is responsible for his belief;* which position he conceives to involve a contradiction to the admitted axiom, that "it is "quite impossible for a man to believe or disbelieve "otherwise than as evidence is or is not discerned." If this be true, he says,—"then a man is not responsible "for his belief assuredly; for *it does not depend on him,* "*but on the evidence.*"—Now this is a little too fast.—It is *not* upon *the evidence,* obviously, that the belief depends; it is upon *the person's discernment of the evidence:* and his responsibility for his belief includes his responsibility for whatever in himself, of a moral nature, affects that discernment. This is the view of the matter given in the sentences of Sermon I. immediately following those quoted by the Reviewer as my admission that

belief must correspond to the perception of evidence :— " But this admission does not, in the smallest degree, " affect our conclusion as to moral responsibility; for " one very obvious reason,—that it is precisely on this " point, the perception of evidence, that the predisposing " causes are apt most powerfully to operate."

Here, then, we are brought to the main question. The doctrine which I have admitted as axiomatic, is, according to the Reviewer, the precise doctrine of Mr. B.'s offensive position. " What, then, is the quarrel " which he has with Mr. Brougham ? *this, and nothing* " *but this being the truth which Mr. Brougham has pro-* " *mulgated?*"—The point which I have made it my object to establish is, according to him, something essentially different from this. " What then, does the Divine " proceed to prove ? That a man is responsible for his " *belief?* No; but for *a very different thing;* for his " *mode of dealing with evidence.*" Page 6.

Let us then consider, a little more closely, what the proposition is which, according to this writer, Mr. B. promulgates.—" The view," says he, " which the mind " takes of evidence, and its belief, are only two names " for one and the same thing. The feeling of the force " of evidence, and belief, are not two mental states; they " are one and the same state. A man regards a piece of " evidence as convincing: this is but another phrase for " saying he is convinced," p. 2.—From this statement it clearly follows, that when it is affirmed that a man is not responsible *for his belief*, it is the same thing as affirming that he is not responsible *for the view which he takes of evidence.* Now, the *impossibility* of a man's believing otherwise than according to the view which his mind takes of evidence is the ground on which it is con-

cluded that man cannot be *responsible* for his belief. The argument is—Man is not responsible for believing according to the view which his mind takes of evidence, because in the nature of the thing he *cannot* believe otherwise. But " the *view which the mind takes of evi-* " *dence*, and *its belief* are," according to this writer, " *one and the same thing*." The proposition, therefore, that a man is not responsible for believing according to the view which his mind takes of evidence, identifies with the proposition that a man is not responsible for *believing as he believes !*

And is this really to be understood by us as the amount of the " GREAT TRUTH THAT HAS FINALLY " GONE FORTH TO ALL THE ENDS OF THE EARTH !" —which Mr. Brougham emblazons in capitals, and holds forth with all the emphasis and exultation of a new and most important discovery ! What kind of compliment does this critic pay to the master mind, whose powers I so heartily unite with him in admiring, when he represents him as giving all this pomp and prominence to so pitiful a truism !—And as for the reasoning of the critic himself, I may fairly retort upon him in his own language—" for what purpose does he put forth all his " strength, to establish a proposition, which no one in " the world ever called in question ?"

" The Divine says, ' It is quite impossible that the " mind should believe otherwise than as evidence is or is " not discerned.' Then a man is not responsible for his " belief assuredly ; *for it does not depend on him, but on* " *the evidence*."—The reason, then, why a man is not responsible for his belief is here stated to be, that his belief " does not depend on himself, but on the evidence." I have already hinted, that this is a very vague and un-

guarded statement. It is clearly, as before observed, not upon the evidence, but upon the man's perception of the evidence, that his belief depends. If therefore it can further be shown, that in any respect *that perception depends upon himself*, then must he, on the admission of the Reviewer, in the degree in which it does so depend, be responsible for his belief. The Reviewer affirms " the " feeling of the force of evidence, and belief, to be one and " the same mental state." Surely, then, whatever, in the moral principles and dispositions of the man, tends to affect his " feeling of the force of evidence," makes that feeling depend upon himself; and in as far as it does so depend, he is virtually, in the very reason assigned for denying his responsibility, admitted to be responsible.— There thus appears to me to be a great deficiency of discriminative accuracy in the views and statements of this writer, notwithstanding the imposing style of metaphysical precision with which they are brought forward. He seems to have laid himself more open than the author whom he attacks, to the charge of maintaining and denying, without perceiving his inconsistency, the same doctrine.

He accuses me of having adopted a very unworthy procedure. " The quality of the line of conduct pur- " sued on this occasion," says he, " is as follows. The " odium which would be justly due to any attempt to " deny or explain away the criminality which may be in- " volved in dealing unfairly, negligently, or dishonestly, " with evidence, the Rev. author endeavours to excite in " the highest possible degree. Having done his best to " excite this odium, he so frames his language as to at- " tach it to the proposition maintained by Mr. Brougham. " The proposition maintained by Mr. B. is a proposition

" undoubtedly true, as is affirmed by the Rev. Author " himself, and it is a proposition of the highest possible " importance, as all the world must allow. Yet the " Rev. Author does his best to attach odium to this " great and salutary truth, and to the man who lent the " aid of his great and powerful name to its dissemina- " tion," p. 5.

After what has already been said, I shall add nothing with regard to the importance of the " great and salutary truth" which, according to this writer, Mr. Brougham's proposition expresses, and which he himself, as we have seen, so felicitously shows to be a very unmeaning and a very harmless truism. But as to myself, he kindly subjoins to the above heavy charge of the greatest disingenuousness of which controversy can admit—" We are " perfectly satisfied, that Dr. Wardlaw has thus deeply " sinned in ignorance, and if he had not totally mistaken " the nature of his act, would have been one of the last " of men to have adopted so reprehensible a proceeding." —I am obliged to him for the alternative thus graciously given me on which to choose, between a *knave* and a *fool.* Of the two, were I really shut up to the choice, I am aware which I *ought* to prefer. But the point is one of delicate determination. I must leave it with my reader. There is a natural self-partiality which may be expected in such a case to influence a man's *belief;* that is, while he is conscious of his not being a knave, to prevent him from *perceiving the evidence* of his being a fool. Whatever may be the predisposing cause, I confess I do not in the present instance *discern this evidence;* and I shall thus stand acquitted in the critic's mind of all responsibility for the sequence of my *not believing it,*—if a sequence it may be called, which he declares to be

" one and the same thing." I must be permitted to decline the kind apology offered for me, because I refuse the charge which it is meant to palliate.—I have done nothing else than what is done, in every other case of moral responsibility, by every ethical philosopher and casuist, by every divine, by every judge, by every barrister, by every man in common life,—I have considered belief, in the attempt to prove man responsible for it, as inclusive of the state of the mind and the affections by which it is influenced and determined; this being as necessary in regard to an intellectual exercise, as in regard to a corporeal act.—There is a paragraph further on in the article, which demands a few observations. I give it entire :—

" Dr. Wardlaw is prodigiously in earnest to convince " the world, that the scripture attaches the greatest merit " to faith, and the greatest demerit to the want of it. " We know not that so much effort on this subject was " necessary; but be that as it may, this at least is cer- " tain, that the scripture can inculcate nothing that is ab- " surd in point of reason, or mischievous in point of " morality. We have seen that it would be absurd in " point of reason, and mischievous in point of morality, " to ascribe merit or demerit to belief. This, therefore, " is what the scripture cannot do. We have seen that it " is most true in point of reason, and sound in point of " morality, to ascribe merit and demerit, even the high- " est, to the proper and improper modes of dealing with " evidence. The consequence is inevitable. It is not " belief which is called in the scripture faith, but the " proper mode of dealing with evidence. The man who " deals properly with evidence is the man who has faith; " the man who deals improperly with it is the man

" who is without faith. Now, it is possible, though " not very common, for a man to deal faithfully with " evidence, doing his utmost to have it fully before him " and to guard his mind from bias to either side, and yet " to come to the wrong conclusion. It is also very pos- " sible, and unhappily very common, that a man who has " never given himself any concern about evidence, and " who has never been without so determined a partiality " for one side, and antipathy to the other, as to exclude " even the approach to his mind of any evidence on the " side which he dislikes, should hold the right opinion. " Notwithstanding this, the former is the man who has " the merit of dealing virtuously, the latter is the man " who has the demerit of dealing wickedly, with evidence. " Here, the man who has the wrong opinion is the man " who has faith, according to the scripture; the man who " has the right opinion is the man who, be the opinion " what it may, is destitute of faith. Faith, in short, has " nothing to do with creeds. Of two men, the one even " an atheist, the other a sound believer, it may be, that " the atheist is the man who has faith, according to the " scripture; that the sound believer is the man who is " destitute of faith, according to the scripture; that the " atheist is possessed of all the merit, the sound believer " of all the demerit, which the scripture ascribes to the " possession or the want of that saving grace. As we " have shown, that, of all classes of men, the clergy, as a " class, are the most constant and the deepest offenders " against the virtue of dealing rightly with evidence, it " follows, that of all classes of men living, the clergy are " the most remarkably destitute of faith; in other words, " are, of all men living, the greatest of infidels."—Pages 20, 21.

I have read many things about faith. But this is one of the most extraordinary paragraphs that has ever fallen in my way. Surely the Old Roman would have been confirmed by it in the truth of his verdict.—" Nil tam absurdum, quod non dici potest ab aliquo philosophorum." I should have left it without comment, but for the importance of some of the topics on which it affords the opportunity for remark. To enlarge on all these topics would be to write a volume. I shall satisfy myself with a few very brief strictures.

And in the first place, the Reviewer sets out with imputing to me in very broad and unqualified terms a sentiment which, (however it may surprise him) I am so far from holding as true, that I regard it as subversive of some of the leading principles of the word of God:—" Dr. W." says he, " is prodigiously " in earnest to convince the world that *the scripture* " *attaches the greatest merit to faith*, and the greatest demerit to the want of it."—My maintaining the *merit of faith* as a doctrine of scripture, must be an inference of this writer from my maintaining the *sinfulness of unbelief*. But the inference is hasty. In the scripture statements regarding the way of salvation, (which it is the chief end of revelation to make known), there is nothing to be found either of the merit of faith or the merit of works. It is a scheme from which every idea of merit is entirely and peremptorily excluded. And it might easily be shown that this proceeds on grounds the simplest and most philosophical. It is a scheme which assumes man to be a transgressor, under the condemnatory sentence of a law which he has violated; and it would be miserably inconsistent with itself, if it held out to a creature so circumstanced any thing of the nature of

merit in the means of his deliverance. That creature is, on the contrary, taught (as, on every principle of the plainest common sense, he ought to be) that for that deliverance he must be a debtor to the free clemency of his justly offended Maker; that he must come for it, stript of every vestige of self-recommendation,—of every claim of right, every plea of desert,—and give himself up to mercy, on the ground of another's mediation. If there be any thing of which I should be "prodigiously in earnest to convince the world," it is this; for this, in as far as the acceptance of a sinner with his God is concerned, is the great fundamental article of Divine truth,—the first principle of the philosophy of the Bible,—to relinquish which is to give up the whole.—It is by no means a necessary sequence, that because there is *sin in unbelief* there is *merit in faith*. The sin that is imputed to unbelief lies in the moral causes from which it arises; and I admit that this I have been in earnest to show,—it being the leading object of the second discourse to demonstrate that in every instance the unbelief of the gospel has its origin in evil. But when I am represented as labouring hard to make it out that "the scripture attaches the *greatest merit* to faith," a most essential feature of my statements, which I believe to be those of the Divine word, is overlooked: namely, that one sinner's believing the gospel, while another rejects it, arises, not from any previously better or more virtuous predisposition in the former than in the latter in favour of its prescriptions, but from the influence of the Spirit of God, opening his mind to a spiritual perception of its excellence and evidence, and subduing the hostility of his heart against it. This sets aside at once every idea of *merit*. I am aware that human philosophy frowns indignantly on such a re-

presentation: and it is in connexion with the *pride of wisdom*, as one of the causes of aversion to the gospel, that I have in the former discourses particularly introduced it. But I cannot on this account flinch from or modify it. It is the representation of the word of God. It is truth. And therefore it is philosophy. The entire exclusion of all merit, and of all ground of personal boasting, is one of the leading principles on which the constitution of the gospel is framed.—I shall have occasion to touch again on this topic immediately.

Secondly: There is in the above extract an exemplification of a mode of dealing with scripture, which is not a little imposing, but very mischievous. It is imposing, because it wears the appearance of a compliment to the sacred volume; it is mischievous, because its tendency is to preclude direct appeal to its authority. It is, however, far from uncommon, especially with that class of religionists who arrogate to themselves the title of *rational*. It is the method, of predetermining in our own minds what reason teaches, as true or as absurd, and drawing our conclusion, previously to any reference to the actual contents of the Bible, what these contents either *must* be or *cannot* be. The Reviewer having represented me as "prodigiously in earnest" to establish a particular view as the doctrine of the scriptures, adds: "We know not that so much effort on that subject was "necessary, but, be that as it may, this at least is cer- "tain, that the scripture can inculcate nothing that is "absurd in point of reason or mischievous in point of "morality." After laying down this position, which must be admitted as incontrovertible by all who acknowledge the scriptures to be God's word, he assumes the sentiment which he had impugned to be the sentiment

which I had maintained, and on the ground of its obvious contrariety to reason and sound morality, he, without more ado, jumps to the *a priori* conclusion, that it *cannot* be taught in the scriptures. He reckons inquiry, in such circumstances, a waste of time and pains:—"Be that as it may"—"we have seen"—"we have seen"—and "the consequence is inevitable." Now, the fair and reasonable mode of procedure would have been, to go directly to the sacred volume itself, with the simple inquiry "What is written?" He should have laid hold of those portions of it, which I had adduced as proofs that *unbelief* is there regarded as *a sin* inferring *guilt* and exposure to punishment;—and should have shown that these portions are susceptible of a simple and consistent explanation, in harmony with his theory about the meaning of the term *faith* as used by the inspired penmen. He should have shown, by a plain and straight-forward interpretation, that in such passages *unbelief* or *not believing*, does not signify the *non-reception* of the testimony of the gospel, nor *faith* its *reception;*—that both terms refer to the examination of evidence, and that there might be unbelief where the testimony was received, and faith where it was rejected; and that it is not at all with the acceptance of their testimony that Christ and his apostles connect life, or with the refusal of it death.—To have attempted this, would have been something to his purpose; and it would have been, at any rate, the true way to evince his regard to sacred authority.—But the theory itself to which I have just alluded, claims a separate notice. Let us see it.—

Thirdly:—The Reviewer's interpretation of Bible phraseology, to which he avows himself shut up as the

" inevitable consequence" of his assumed principles, is such as, if admitted, would destroy utterly the definiteness of all Divine communications, and shut up the Book in unintelligible obscurity.—" We have seen," he says, " that it would be absurd in point of reason, and mis- " chievous in point of morality, to ascribe merit or de- " merit to belief. We have seen, that it is most true in " point of reason, and sound in point of morality, to " ascribe merit and demerit, even the highest, to the pro- " per and improper modes of dealing with evidence. *The* " *consequence is inevitable. It is not belief which is* " *called in scripture faith; but the proper mode of dealing* " *with evidence.*"

" It is *not belief* that is called in the scripture *faith!*" Now, why attempt, by such a mode of phraseology, to blind the eyes of superficial thinkers? Why not say at once, " it is not *belief* that is called in the scripture *belief?* The term *belief*, this critic must be aware, is employed by our translators in rendering the original word, as well as *faith*. It had been well, perhaps, if it had been so rendered more frequently. By thus identifying it with *faith*, the mystical illusions sometimes associated with the latter term might in part have been dissipated. The corresponding verb *to believe*, however, is incessant in its occurrence.—Now, I must be allowed to insist upon it, as a principle of the very last importance for the right interpretation of the scriptures, that those who were employed in conveying the mind of God to men, *used words in their established and ordinary acceptation.* They surely *meant to be understood.* But understood they could not be, if, in their preaching and in their writings, they employed terms in a sense of their

own, materially different from that in common currency. The assumption so unhappily prevalent that there is a peculiar meaning,—a sacred, *isoteric* import,—in the terms of holy writ, has given origin and sanction to the wildest extravagancies of mysticism.—In the present instance, not only were the people to whom the publishers of Divine truth addressed themselves, whether in speech or in writing, accustomed to associate a fixed and simple conception with the term, when they were called to *believe* the testimony delivered to them;—but the same speakers and writers employed the same and its cognate terms on various other subjects, as well as with reference to the gospel. The word *believe* was in common use with them. On what reasonable principle, then, are they to be conceived to have attached a different meaning to it when it related to *divine* truths, from that which it bore when applied to *common* truths? In that case, a sacred glossary would have been requisite. But no such glossary was given; and the reason is, that no one, in those days of simplicity, felt any occasion for it. Terms were used, which all understood. The question, What do you mean by *believing?* was a question which probably never suggested itself to a single mind. The *testimony*, and the *evidence of its truth*, were the points of inquiry.—The Reviewer conceives his conclusion about the meaning of *faith* to be rendered "inevitable" by the self-evident positions, which constitute the premises whence it is deduced. But the truth is, there is no puzzle in the case. There is not the least necessity, such as he fancies, for a change in the meaning of so simple a term. Only admit, that *faith*, or *belief*, (for I must insist on their being the same,) when considered as the subject of

moral responsibility, *is connected with the state of the mind and affections by which it is influenced*,—and the difficulty vanishes. This it was a leading object of the Two Sermons to establish.—But

Fourthly: Another curious proposition in this writer's extraordinary theory of faith, is expressed in this sentence:—"*Faith, in short, has nothing to do with creeds.*" This is indeed a notable discovery. Is this writer not aware, that in numberless instances, where faith is connected with the enjoyment of forgiveness and of life, it is *the faith of certain propositions or truths*, which are distinctly specified in the very same sentence? I scarcely know what instances to select, they are so numerous.—John xx. 31. "Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples," (i. e. after his resurrection, and for certification of that all-important fact) "which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe *that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*, and that, believing, *ye might have life* through his name."—John viii. 24. "If ye believe not *that I am he*, ye shall die in your sins."—Acts viii. 37. "If thou believest with all thine heart," (i. e. if thou sincerely and in earnest believest) "thou mayest. And he said, I believe *that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*."—2 Thess. ii. 13. "God hath chosen you to salvation, through . . . . . belief *of the truth*."—1 John v. 10. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar, because he believeth not *the record that God gave of his Son*. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son."—It is not with the import of the propositions to be believed that we have at present to do: it

is simply the connexion of the faith which brings salvation with *something believed.* In this respect, such passages, which might be indefinitely multiplied, are in direct opposition to the marvellous statement that "faith has nothing to do with creeds:"—a statement which is equivalent to this—that *belief* has nothing to do with *a thing believed!*—Now the philosophical truth of the matter is, that the *entire efficiency of faith,* in every view of it, arises from *the nature of that which is believed.* I am well aware, that the term *faith* is frequently—much too frequently—used, as if it denoted some *abstract principle,* and that too of a very occult and mystical nature,—and that it conveys this impression to many minds, and keeps them groping in the dark, and harassed with perplexities. I know few things of more consequence, on this subject, than to hold forth the simple proposition that *faith can have no subsistence in any mind irrespectively of an object.* It is "the *belief of the truth,*" 2 Thess. ii. 13. and *the truth* must be *present to the mind as the object of it,* else it is not, and cannot be, in exercise. Faith supposes an object believed, as much as love supposes an object loved.—And faith, whether represented as justifying, or as sanctifying, derives its virtue from the *nature of the truth believed.* The testimony of the gospel is fitted for both purposes. It is fitted for *justifying* the sinner, and giving him peace with God, because it reveals the righteousness and atonement of a Mediator, as the divinely sanctioned ground of pardon and acceptance: and it is fitted for *sanctifying* him, because it exhibits those views of God, that win the heart from enmity to love, and that contain in them the most persuasive and overpowering motives to holy imitation and devoted service.—It is a

simple philosophical principle, that *any truth believed will produce effects corresponding to its nature and the circumstances of the person believing it.* In their representations of the influence of faith upon character, the scriptures proceed upon this rational principle,—a principle divested of all mysticism, and level to every capacity. They say, "Purifying their hearts *by faith;*" and they say, "Sanctify them *through thy truth;* thy word is truth."—It is *the truth* that sanctifies,—that exerts the rectifying influence upon the heart:—but it is of course the truth *believed.* It is by faith that it is introduced into the mind, and comes into influential contact and incorporation with the affections and desires, operating upon them according to its characteristic nature and tendencies. This too is the view of the case given by Paul when he says, 1 Thess. ii. 13. "When ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it, not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, *which effectually worketh* also *in you that believe.*"—This is true philosophy, free from all perplexing mystery. *The truth* possesses a certain *moral fitness* for working a change on the human heart and character: and when it is understood and believed, this fitness is made apparent in the actual production of the change. But the strangely anomalous doctrine that separates "faith" from "creeds," —that makes it something (be that what it may) independent of an object, or independent of the truth or falsehood of its object, subverts this beautiful philosophical simplicity, and involves in utter confusion the whole of the Bible statements respecting the efficacy of that simple principle to which they ascribe so much.

I cannot but feel as if I had been almost mispending

time in commenting on such opinions as those broached by the Reviewer, when I look at the following sentences, which occur immediately after describing the conduct of the man who deals *properly*, and of the man who deals *improperly*, with evidence, of whom, however, the former is supposed to arrive, unfortunately, but not by any fault of his, at a wrong conclusion, while the former, by chance rather than fair inquiry, happens to hold truth. "Notwithstanding this, the former is the man who has the "merit of dealing virtuously, the latter is the man who "has the demerit of dealing wickedly, with evidence. "Here the man who has the wrong opinion is the man "who has faith, according to the scripture; the man who "has the right opinion is the man who, be the opinion "what it may, is destitute of faith. Faith, in short, has "nothing to do with creeds. Of two men, the one even "an atheist, the other a sound believer, it may be that "the atheist is the man who has faith according to the "scripture; that the sound believer is the man who is "destitute of faith according to the scripture; that the "atheist is possessed of all the merit, the sound believer "of all the demerit, which the scripture ascribes to the "possession or the want of that saving grace."

I find it exceedingly difficult, with the utmost stretch of charity, to believe a man in earnest who writes thus. Had he left out the words,—"*according to the scripture*," —it had been well. We should then have had his own speculation about faith, without any pretension to divine authority on its behalf. But that any man who has ever opened a Bible should have the effrontery to say, that "according to the scripture" a person may have the "saving grace" of "faith" "*be his opinions what they*

may," however opposite to all that is " written in that book,"—that even an avowed " *atheist*" may be a scriptural *believer*, and, by consequence, " according to the scripture," justified by his faith, and sanctified by his faith,—loving and serving under its influence, the Being whose existence he denies,—and rejoicing in hope of a glory which he regards as the " paradise of fools,"—and ——— but there is no end to the absurdities of such a hypothesis. There is something so wild and extravagant about it,—so destitute of every thing approaching to verisimilitude,—that I should have thought it quite innoxious from its very grossness, had it not been actually extracted into Newspapers, with the seeming approbation of correspondents.—Most men, however, will find little difficulty in perceiving, that the faith of which the scriptures speak is the *faith of what the scriptures testify;* and will be in very little danger from a theory which affirms the existence of saving faith where there is the extinction of all religious truth, (for there can be no religious truth where there is no God)—and which makes, not only the merit of faith, but the merit of the faith of an atheist, the ground of acceptance with God and admission to Heaven! Where was this writer's Bible, when such a theory was framed? It would, in my apprehension, be far more consistent for him to renounce scripture at once, than, under a professed appeal to its authority, to set aside its plainest and most peremptory statements;—to plead its sanction, for identifying, in their consequences, not *infidelity* merely, but even *atheism*, and the *faith of Christ;*—to represent the gospel as holding forth eternal life as the well-earned desert of the man who has meritoriously reasoned himself into the conviction that there is no God!—the due re-

ward of the merit of an atheist!—Let this stand as the creed of the Westminster Review; but let the Bible be honestly given up by him who holds it.

In the heavy censure passed (in the close of the paragraph before quoted) upon "*the clergy*," as of all men the most deeply chargeable with the improper treatment of evidence,—and therefore of all men the greatest infidels, I presume it is intended that I should consider myself as involved. He repeats this censure again and again. "Let us first of all consider the nature "of that constant endeavour of theirs to confound the "attributes of belief with those of the behaviour to evi- "dence, to ascribe to mere belief the praise or blame "which can alone be due to the mode of dealing with "evidence." And again: "Not only do they attach a "merit and demerit to mere belief; they attach conse- "quences of unspeakable importance to the holding or "not holding certain opinions,—the favour or disfavour "of Almighty God, and pain or pleasure infinite and "eternal."

If there be any to whom this charge comes home, they may defend themselves. But for my own part, the sentiment which connects eternal consequences with "mere belief," *in the sense in which the phrase is used by this writer*, I neither hold myself, nor do I know of any one who does hold it. That I do not hold it myself, this writer, as we have seen, both affirms and denies. For after having charged me with asserting it, he proceeds to show that my proofs are directed to the establishment of "a very different thing." He thinks, indeed, out of charity to my moral principles, that this was the effect of stupidity. But I do not think I am guilty of a breach

of the apostolic precept, "not to think of myself more highly than I ought to think," when I say he is mistaken. I knew my ground; and proceeded on the principle, universally recognized in every thing else, that belief, considered as the subject of responsibility, is to be taken in connexion with the moral state of the dispositions, by which it is influenced. If any have thought, or spoken, or written otherwise (of which, however, I am not aware) I am not answerable for their inconsistencies. It is easy to produce a prejudice by the use of particular words: as when this Reviewer represents the clergy as connecting "eternal consequences," and the "favour or disfavour of Almighty God," with the "*holding or not holding certain opinions*." But if by this phrase he means the same thing with "*believing or not believing certain truths*,"—then, before renouncing this connection, we must renounce our Bibles. According to this writer, the supposition that the future prospects of men are to be affected by the belief or disbelief of any thing whatever, is a self-interested device of the clergy,—one of the convenient bugbears of priestcraft. There is nothing,—if his theory be true,—nothing whatsoever, amongst all its contents, which the Bible requires a man to believe in order to his salvation. He may reject every iota of its testimony, and yet have the faith which it enjoins! He may be a determined unbeliever of all its communications, and yet not be an infidel! He may disclaim all connection with the Saviour whom the scriptures reveal, and yet be saved by a scriptural faith!—This is itself infidelity. It is too gross to be dangerous. Nor can any terms of disapprobation be too strong, for the unworthy sophistry, that would plead scripture authority for over-

turning scripture obligations.—" The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him," John iii. 35, 36.—" He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day," John xii. 48.

THE END.

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